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# West Berkshire Council Customer Charter

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	12 January 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Lynne Doherty
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	22 December 2022
<b>Report Author:</b>	Gabrielle Mancini
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4311

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present a formal public-facing Customer Services Charter. This was a key action within the Communications and Engagement Strategy and will form part of the 'One Council' approach (also known as 'Many Channels, One Service project) being developed. Elements of the Digital Strategy will also be incorporated in this Charter in line with other commitments to further digitisation.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the draft Customer Charter is approved by Executive.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	Adopting the Charter itself will not have any direct costs.  The indirect costs attributed to staff training and further digitisation have either been accounted for or, where necessary, will be subject to Transformation Funding at relevant stages of the project.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	Staff training will eventually form part of the induction and training programme.

<b>Legal:</b>	None. The Monitoring Officer was consulted while drafting this report.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	There is a risk that we leave the organisation open to more complaints if we are in breach of our own service standards. It is not considered that this would be a valid reason not to proceed.			
<b>Property:</b>	None. However, one of the considerations of the Many Channels, One Service will be to offer a 'pod' in Reception and in community hubs whereby customers can access digital services within our building. This will have some impact from a Property perspective.			
<b>Policy:</b>	N/A			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			An improved and more accessible service can only have positive impacts for all in the community, particularly given our commitment to reaching out to seldom heard communities.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			An improved and more accessible service can only have positive impacts for all in the community, particularly given our commitment to reaching out to seldom heard communities.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	x			Extended access to digital services will avoid the need to travel to in-person appointments and meetings.

<b>Health Impact:</b>		x		N/A
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		x		It is likely that additional digitisation will have an impact on our network. However, our experiences during Covid have demonstrated that the system is sufficiently resilient.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		It is likely that additional digitisation will have resource implications for the Digital Team. However, these have been accounted for already in our service planning and in the Digital Strategy.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	x			Priority- Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships  This will positively impact on the service levels offered to our customers and will also allow us to use customer data to improve service delivery.
<b>Core Business:</b>	x			This will positively impact on the service levels offered to our customers and will also allow us to use customer data to improve service delivery.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		It may do depending on the method used to collate customer feedback and the digital platforms used to carry out digital transactions.

<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	All Department/Service Management Teams Customer First Programme Board All Customer Services staff A series of staff focus groups Sam Shepherd- Programme Manager- Local Communities Pamela Voss- Equality and Diversity Officer Resident focus groups attended by the Consultation & Engagement Officer
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## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The development of a Customer Services Charter was a key action contained within the Communications and Engagement Strategy, which was approved by Executive in October 2020.
- 4.2 The Charter contains a number of proposed clear service standards which customers can expect regardless of the channel chosen to contact us.
- 4.3 These standards relate to the various channels through which our customers engage with us, including:
  - Telephone
  - Email or letter
  - Social media
  - At our offices
  - In their homes/ the community
- 4.4 It also contains information about how customers can escalate their concerns, compliments or feedback so that we can resolve issues and use this to further improve our service delivery.
- 4.5 The final part of the Charter seeks to outline what we ask of our customers in order to perform our roles effectively and help them in a timely manner.
- 4.6 This draft Charter was subject to internal and external testing over the past six months and is now ready to be considered for adoption.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 The Communications and Engagement Strategy was adopted in October 2020 in response to recommendations contained in a Local Government Association Peer Review which took place in November 2019 as well as to enhanced levels of

engagement with the community as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the actions contained within the strategy was the establishment of a Customer Charter with the aim of setting out clear and consistent service standards for our customers.

## Background

- 5.2 The Local Government Peer Review which took place in November 2019 found that although West Berkshire Council is a high performing local authority, there were ways in which the authority could make improvements to the way in which it communicates and engages with its community as well as taking a more active role in the Place-making agenda. As a result, senior officers began to consider how communications and engagement might be made more prominent within the organisation.
- 5.3 The Covid-19 Pandemic necessitated an overnight change in how the Council both communicated and engaged with its local communities and consequently, enhanced performance was delivered at pace. Key changes have included the deployment of additional resources, less reliance on local media and more focus on contacting residents and businesses directly, a more prominent role for the Council Leader and Chief Executive and an increased focus on digital communication.
- 5.4 This work eventually resulted in the development of the Communications and Engagement Strategy, which was eventually adopted in October 2020. This strategy contained a number of transformative initiatives with respect to improving the authority's communication and engagement with its communities, of which a Customer Charter was one.
- 5.5 This draft charter was developed in conjunction with all service areas within the authority and has achieved consensus.

## Proposals

- It is proposed that this draft Customer Charter, which has been subject to consultation with all service areas, is rolled out to all service areas to ensure that the level of service offered meets needs of all within the community.
- It is proposed that this Charter is adopted in tandem with a concerted internal effort towards a culture whereby good customer service is seen to be the responsibility of all within the organisation. This will ensure the successful implementation of the Charter.
- It is proposed that this Charter is adopted in tandem with the Many Channels, One Service approach, including the aspirations set out in the Digital Strategy. This will ensure that there is strategic alignment and that customers have the best possible chance of receiving a high standard of customer service, regardless of channel or service area.

## 6 Other options considered

- 6.1 Not adopting a Customer Charter could be considered, but this would be contrary to the actions set out within the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Ensuring that customers receive a consistently high standard of service regardless of the channel through which they choose to contact us and the service area they are accessing is a priority for us as a customer-focussed organisation.
- 7.2 Although there is an underlying understanding of the organisation's expectations with respect to customer service and the authority has good levels of customer satisfaction, a formal charter has never been adopted. Many authorities use similar charters to communicate clearly what customers should expect, as well as what is expected of them, and the Communications and Engagement Strategy made the case for this model to be adopted in West Berkshire.
- 7.3 There is a need to ensure that everyone within the organisation has the skills and tools they need to deliver the standards of customer service contained within the charter. For this reason, training in communications should be rolled out as part of mandatory training in a way that is tailored to the expectations apportioned to officers at various levels of the organisations. This internal element of rolling out the charter effectively will run in tandem with our public-facing efforts to test, finalise and publicise it.
- 7.4 There are also clear expectations outlined in the Digital Strategy about extending access to our digital platforms so that the range of transactions available meets customer demand. This may also lead to improvements with service standards received by customers using other channels as the number of high volume transactions being processed manually are likely to decrease. It also bears repeating that the service standards expressed in the charter will apply to our digital services as well as our other channels.
- 7.5 By adopting a charter that we have co-produced with all service areas and using data from the Residents Survey, we move closer to our aspirations of becoming a more effective and inclusive local authority. For this reason, this approach meets our strategic priorities with respect to communications and engagement.

## 8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Draft Customer Charter

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### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
  - Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
  - Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
  - Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
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Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

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