

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE**  
**CABINET**

**Date:12<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

**REPORT TITLE**            Customer Service and Access Strategy and Customer Promise

**Submitted by:**            Executive Director (Resources & Support Services)

**Portfolio:**                 Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Service

**Ward(s) affected:**        Non specific

**Purpose of the Report**

To seek Cabinet approval for the replacement of the Customer Access Strategy and Customer Charter with the Customer Service and Access Strategy and Customer Promise.

**Recommendation**

**That Cabinet approve the Customer Service and Access Strategy and Customer Promise.**

**Reasons**

The Customer Access Strategy and accompanying Customer Charter have been in place since 2007. A review has been undertaken and an organisation wide Customer Service and Access Strategy ('the Strategy') and Customer Promise will better reflect and incorporate the national 'Customer Service Excellence Standard' best practice along with the latest industry guidelines.

**1. Background**

1.1 The Customer Access Strategy and accompanying Customer Charter were approved by Cabinet in 2007 and centred around 4 customer focused themes:

- greater access to services;
- joined up services, both internally and with the community;
- more coordination of services from the public's view;
- greater efficiency in customer facing service channels.

1.2 Over the last few years the Council has transformed the ways in which customers can access services; for example, through the creation of Customer Service Centres with joined up services, improvements in telephony, the development of customer relationship management (CRM) software, and by extending the range of services that are available to customers at the front line.

1.3 The Council recognises that there is work still to do to ensure that service delivery matches current and future customer expectations and The Strategy aims to ensure that the Council's resources will be focused on achieving common objectives across the whole organisation to benefit both the organisation and the community it serves.

**2. Issues**

## Classification: NULBC **PROTECT** Organisational

- 2.1 The themes noted above are still relevant today; however the ways in which customers' expect to access information and services has changed considerably. Major advances in technology mean that there is an increasing expectation from customers to do business with the Council in the same ways that they do with other organisations and agencies, and at times that suit them. This ultimately means that electronic 'end to end' solutions<sup>1</sup>, such as current provided by the Planning 'Public Access' system whereby the public can submit and comment on planning applications directly via the web, must be increased and coordinated to match demand. The aim of the Strategy is to respond to these current and future needs moving forward and provide details of how these changes will affect and improve access to service delivery.
- 2.2 The existing Customer Access Strategy has proved to be successful, but is now limited in its scope in that it has focused on customer services as a department and has therefore not been adopted by all areas of the Council. There is now an organisational requirement to extend the standards of service achieved by Customer Services as a department, evidenced by the awarding of the government's national Customer Service Excellence standard for the last four years, to the rest of the Authority to ensure that the customer experience is of consistent, high quality and meets customer needs regardless of contact method or service chosen.
- 2.3 Although it is likely that face-to-face, telephone and paper options for access to Council services will continue for some time, justification should be increasingly needed to continue delivering services at the current level of provision via these channels if a digital alternative is available that provides simple, end to end solutions and satisfies a customer's request for service at their first point of contact.
- 2.4 The latest Customer Service Excellence Standard advocates the introduction of two items:
- 'Customer Standards and Access Strategy - a document that details a corporate approach to achieving the five customer focused themes of the Standard;
  - 'Customer Promise' - a visual interpretation of the standards of service that customers can expect as "bullet points" which should be displayed in all front line customer areas/sites.

### **3. Outcomes linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

The outcome supports becoming a cooperative Council, delivering high quality community driven services, by providing a clear commitment to the customer, enhancing transparency and providing consistency in the way in which we serve our customers.

### **4. Legal and Statutory Implications**

Although there are no legal or statutory requirements for the Council to adopt such a Strategy, it is considered good practice to provide a framework which outlines the Council's commitment to customers in terms of service and improved access, whilst enabling us to put into practise the guidelines and priorities set out by Customer Service Excellence accreditation.

### **5. Equality Impact Assessment**

An equalities impact assessment review is undertaken regularly in order to ensure that all customers are able to access services easily and equally.

### **6. Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no significant financial or resource implications specifically associated with the approval of this Policy above those expected in updating and training staff to the required level to achieve the Customer Service Excellence standard. A review of the financial and resource implications resulting

---

<sup>1</sup> End to end solutions are defined as those that enable a request to be submitted electronically and the request to be progressed through systems without additional manual intervention, to satisfactory completion.

Classification: NULBC **PROTECT** Organisational

from any increased requirement for mobile and agile working together with further electronic scanning of documents may be needed if these solutions are further implemented.

**7. Major Risks**

No major risks have been highlighted.

**8. Earlier Cabinet Resolutions**

Customer Access Strategy 2007

**9. Recommendation**

That Cabinet approve the Customer Service & Access Strategy and Customer Promise, for the reasons given in the report.

**10. List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Customer Service & Access Strategy

Appendix B: Customer Promise

**11. Background Papers**

The Customer Access Strategy 2007 can be found using the following link [http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/documents/Policies%20and%20Strategies/C/Customer%20Access%20Strategy\\_SX9690-A7808950.pdf](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/documents/Policies%20and%20Strategies/C/Customer%20Access%20Strategy_SX9690-A7808950.pdf)

Details of the Customer Charter can be found on the Council's website using the following link [http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online\\_content.asp?id=SXA175-A780DF44&cat=1535](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online_content.asp?id=SXA175-A780DF44&cat=1535)

Classification: NULBC **PROTECT** Organisational