



TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 January 2024

REPORT TITLE:	CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOODS

REPORT SUMMARY

Wirral Council is committed to providing exceptional customer service. The Customer Experience Strategy set out how that will be achieved from 2023 to 2027.

This strategy was developed to support the delivery of all five of the themes within the previous Wirral plan. The strategy now sits under the Efficient, Effective and Accessible Council theme within Wirral Working Together: A Council Plan for 2023 – 2027.

At its heart, this strategy promotes the concept that customer service is not the responsibility of a single team or department, but instead recognises that it is a cross cutting theme that spans the whole organisation.

In March 2023 this committee requested a subsequent progress update. This report provides that update on both the actions contained within the strategy and the measures used to assess its success.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is recommended to note the progress made in delivering the Customer Experience Strategy

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 At the time of development, the Customer Experience Strategy was a key element of the Wirral Improvement Plan. The strategy now sits under the Efficient, Effective and Accessible Council theme within Wirral Working Together: A Council Plan for 2023 – 2027.
- 1.2 In March 2023 this Committee requested a progress update report later in 2023/24.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Wirral Improvement Plan stipulated the development of a Customer Experience Strategy, therefore no other options were considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The implementation of the Customer Experience Strategy has seen a wide range of internal stakeholder involvement since its approval at committee in March 2023. A working group has been established, bringing officers from across the organisation together. This co-operative approach ensures that the implementation of the strategy has wide-ranging buy in, reflecting the bespoke needs across Directorates.
- 3.2 Following committee approval the strategy (as set out in Appendix 1 of this report), along with the accompanying Customer Charter (as set out in Appendix 2 of this report) has been presented to Directorate Management Teams across the organisation. This approach supported initial socialisation of the documents and facilitated requests for Directorial Champion Volunteers for the Customer Experience Strategy Working Group (CESWG). This working group meets regularly and supports the delivery of this strategy.
- 3.3 Officers from the CESWG also regularly attend the Member Steering Support Group. This allows regular progress updates and provides an opportunity for members to feedback their experiences, particularly in relation to the Member Portal and their various interactions with officers. This feedback is extremely valuable as it ensures the system can be developed in line with real experiences of members.
- 3.4 The work around the strategy has delivered a number of tangible process changes so far, the first of which is in relation to the Member Escalation Process. The Member Portal now has a facility which allows members to escalate their original referral to Assistant Director level, should they deem it necessary. This function went live in May 2023. Members can escalate a referral when it is closed or has gone beyond ten working days for reasons as follows:
 - The agreed target for response is overdue and no response received
 - The case has been closed and the work has not been completed'
 - The response I have received is incomplete/did not address the issue I raised
 - The decision has been made in error/without considering all the relevant facts
 - Other'

- 3.5 This new addition to the Member Portal has been under review since its release. Version Two is (at the time of writing this report) imminent. This new version will increase functionality for elected members to engage with the senior officers responding to their query.
- 3.6 In April 2023 a further tangible process change was introduced, the Member of Parliament (MP) Protocol. This new protocol formalised the ten working day service level agreement for MP referrals and also rationalised the route for incoming MP emails. MPs were given a designated email address to contact which is monitored by the Customer Feedback Team (CFT). All MP referrals coming in via this route are triaged by the CFT and distributed to the relevant senior officers (head of service or above). This new approach aims to ensure when an MP makes a referral it is almost immediately visible, allocated to the correct service and dealt with by a senior officer. This new approach minimises the potential for human error and operational inefficiencies when MPs referrals are received by multiple in boxes across the organisation. Since going live in April 2023 an average of over 22 MP referrals per week have been received by the CFT, for responses across the organisation.
- 3.7 The successful integration of the Customer Charter and delivery of the strategy requires some ongoing cultural changes across the organisation. Staff learning is currently being developed to ensure staff are properly equipped to respond to referrals in the first instance. The programme is being led by members of the CEWG, working in both Organisational Development and Learning and Inclusion. This learning will be rolled out by service area, starting with some of the teams that receive the highest volume of referrals. The current proposal is to provide face to face learning focussing on the customer service mindset, effective communication, and expectation management, among other themes. The projected start date for this programme of learning is February 2024.
- 3.8 Further development of member learning and support opportunities are also being explored. This will build upon events such as the Member Portal session held in October 2023, alongside bespoke support opportunities managed by colleagues in Democratic Services.
- 3.9 The Customer Experience Strategy has a very clear action plan contained within it. Progress against this action plan is being driven by the CEWG, referenced in 3.1 above. Progress against each action can be seen in appendix 3 of this report. All actions within the action plan are, at the time of writing this report, either 'Green' or 'Complete'. The report generated by Power BI will show some actions/milestones as 'Amber' if they have previously been delayed.
- 3.10 Appendix 3 of this report also details performance against the measures of success within the Customer Experience Strategy against the four priorities:
1. Putting Customers at the Heart of What We Do
 2. Service Accessibility
 3. Harnessing Digital Technology
 4. Embedding Customer Experience Across the Whole Organisation

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As part of the Wirral Improvement Plan the Customer Experience Strategy will support the Council in achieving financial stability.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Customer Experience Strategy will be delivered within existing Council budgets and resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Without this Customer Experience Strategy, the Customer Charter and the associated employee learning development, Wirral Council will not increase its capacity to be 'Customer/Resident Focussed'.
- 7.2 The Customer Experience Strategy needs associated resources from across the organisation to ensure its delivery. This resource is currently being met by members of the CEWG but there is always the risk that competing priorities impact upon delivery.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A draft version of the Customer Experience Strategy was presented to Senior Leadership Team in February 2022. Engagement across directorates took place between March 2022 and April 2022 lead by the strategy development group. Recognising the different perspectives that services will have on Customer Experience, each Directorate identified a senior 'Customer Experience Champion' who was able to challenge existing ways of working to inform and drive improvements. This also included Officers from Wirral Intelligence and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 8.2 Representatives were invited to help shape the development of the Customer Experience strategy with comments and suggestions incorporated into the strategy. Innovative online collaboration tools were utilised to ensure maximise the opportunity to engage.
- 8.3 The strategy itself identifies a series of key points to engage and consult to ensure success (see appendix one, page 11 'How we will deliver the strategy').

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment for this strategy has been completed during its development in 2022 and can be found here <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-january-202-4>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 By improving the efficiency of our customer interactions we will decrease the amount of avoidable contact we receive and as such the need to physically revisit referral locations. This will decrease the wider carbon footprint of our frontline services.

10.2 Increasing and enhancing our digital offer will reduce the need for customers to physically attend appointments, minimising their carbon footprint. Overall, the move towards more digital services will have a positive impact on council's carbon emissions and that of residents. This could also lead to a reduction in Wirral's asset portfolio. It is key to remember however, that digital based services still have an impact on carbon emissions from data storage, therefore services will be designed to minimise the carbon emissions, e.g. by reducing data retention time.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Embedding customer experience as part of our core vision and encouraging values of 'being customer focussed' will encourage community involvement and create a positive environment to build on local investment into the community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Customer Experience Strategy

Appendix 2 Customer Charter

Appendix 3 Customer Experience Strategy Performance Report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Wirral Plan 2021-2016
- Wirral Improvement Plan

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee is charged by full Council to undertake responsibility for the Council's role and functions: - (a) for customer and community contact services, including various offices and meeting points, customer contact centres and advice and transaction services.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee ('Wirral Improvement Plan')	27 June 2022
Tourism Culture and Leisure Committee	9 March 2023