POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE	Agenda Item 58
	Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Improving the Customer Experience		
Date of Meeting:	17 October 2013		
Report of:	Executive Director of Finance & Resources		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1   Customer Access is an integral and cross cutting part of the Modernisation agenda. The Programme sits alongside Workstyles and Business Process Improvement under the fourth priority in the Corporate Plan to Modernise the Council. The outcomes under this priority are:

- Good governance and leadership;
- A high performing workforce;
- Excellent customer service; and
- Value for money.

1.2   We are embedding the Customer Promise in services and improving the customer experience by focusing on a range of work to make it easier for people in the city to access services. Results from the 2013 City Tracker survey confirm an increase in customer satisfaction with the council since the Customer Access Programme began.

1.3   This report sets our approach to invest in projects so our customers experience is enhanced whether they prefer to contact the council online, in person or by telephone. The investment needed to improve the customers experience is part of the council's agreed ICT strategy and builds on our existing infrastructure and redesigned website. Making the best use of technology is essential if we are to ensure excellent access to services in the context of overall budget reductions.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Policy & Resources Committee –

2.1   Approve a £273,000 "invest to save" customer access project to make it easier to access parking services online and through smart phones.

2.2　Grants delegated authority to the Executive Director Finance & Resources to authorise further customer access invest to save projects within the parameters set out in paragraph 7.2.

3.　CONTEXT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

3.1　Our work on Customer Access and feedback from residents has told us we need to make it easier for people to access information and use council services. We are working hard to simplify processes for the customer across all access channels (face to face; telephone and digital) by using technology to be more responsive to customer needs. Some examples of achievements are our Customer Service Centre in Brighton, the joint Customer Service Centre with the police in Hove, our website redesign, and our award winning Council Connect service in Libraries.

Access to Parking Services

3.2　Our initial investment in a customer access project will be in Parking Services who have a high volume of customers that want to undertake transactions quickly and efficiently. Currently, permits require a form to be completed which can be posted or taken to Hove Town Hall. Residents can also renew permits online providing there are no changes. The service aims to process applications within five working days. The investment will be used to provide a single online application and payment process for customers to purchase visitor, resident and business parking permits. It will enable the provision of virtual parking permits which can be processed on the same day. We will redesign the website pages so it can be easily used at the customer's convenience or by council staff on their behalf. The technology will be used to create a simple and quick process for customers and staff.

3.3　This investment will generate total annual savings of £100,000 per annum from stationery, printing and postage costs associated with printing physical permits and efficiency savings as processing time is reduced. There is potential for the efficiency savings to be realised over time.

3.4　This programme of work responds to people's demands and the way most now want to access our services particularly our more transactional services. As the programme rolls out, customer information across services will help us to provide them with a more joined up experience. We will be better placed to answer customer queries at the point of contact and to plan future services to meet the city's needs.

3.5　This is one strand of the council's Modernisation Programme, alongside Workstyles and Business Programme Improvement, to use technology to improve the way we work. It can improve business processes and service delivery as well as meeting customer expectations. This gives the council significant opportunities for financial savings and efficiencies.

Online Services

3.6　Customer insight work shows that many of our residents want to be able to do more online with two thirds of our population being open to self serve on the web.

Brighton & Hove is a digitally active city and it is important that our services respond to this. The investment will also be used to build on the improvements that we have made to our website by further enhancing the experience and, creating more automated web forms that integrate to and retrieve data from the back office. These are currently being used in Environment to report a missed bin or get information on waste collection days. Online services like these ensure that we are not out of step with the digital expectations of our city.

3.7   Digital Inclusion is an integral part of this work and we will continue to ensure that council services are available in person and on the telephone and not just digitally. We recognise online access is not something that everyone feels able or confident to use. Following the recommendations of the City Management Board, we are working with partners across the city to optimise digital inclusion. The Council Connect service in libraries to help people get online is one successful example of how we are doing this.

Customer Experience Management

3.8   Customer Experience Management (CEM) is the software that supports the customer interface with council services and databases – this could be through a web transaction but can equally be used on the telephone and at reception points. It is already supporting our staff in the Environment call centre to access information immediately and enables quicker processing of enquiries. More joined up services for the customer will emerge as more services begin to use CEM. Ultimately, it will lead to a 'My Account' facility, which provides customers with single and secure access to council services and assures their identity. As we move towards this we will work in line with the best practice from the Government Digital Service work on ID Assurance Programme.

3.9   A CEM system was procured by the council in 2012 to replace the system used by the Environment contact centre. The system is flexible enough to use across a range of services dealing with customer queries or transactions. This proposal will maximise the use of the system across a number of different council services. The CEM system includes three products known as 'Achieve';

   o   Achieve Forms – web forms which integrate with back office systems
   o   Achieve Service – a system that provides access to and manages customer information
   o   Achieve Self Service – a common interface which includes the ability for customers to complete transactions on line and enables a 'my account' facility.

3.10   The use of the Achieve products has been implemented by several teams within our customer access priorities. We are now at a stage where we want to establish corporate support for services and consistently deliver them through a programme of work over three years, with benefits emerging from year two. Case studies are provided in the Appendix 1.

3.11   After the project in Parking, work will begin with Council Tax to enhance their online services; create an open and transparent way to invite Customer Feedback (Complaints & Compliments); make it easier for services to use capture and share Equalities monitoring data to minimise the need to keep

asking customers for this information. We also continue to aim to make council services consistent on the website. Each project will be supported by a business case to payback investment in a timely period and to deliver annual savings and efficiencies within services.

3.12 The programme will retain capacity to deliver tactical projects to meet current service demands and close collaboration with the two other main council modernisation cross cutting programmes (Business Process Improvement and Workstyles). The skills created through this work will ensure that our digital solutions are sustainable and will avoid the cost of buying in skills or technical systems in the long term.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 Four delivery options have been considered; the preferred option is to develop a programme of work service by service. Option One was to do nothing or deliver a smaller programme, this would require fewer resources, but would not deliver benefits within the timeframe or scale required. Doing the minimum would deliver some benefits, but would not optimise the corporate potential of cross service transactions or consistent governance to deliver CEM consistently for customers.

4.2 The second and preferred option will bring a wide variety of benefits by making frequent customer transactions easier and more efficient for the customer however they choose to access services. As more services use the CEM it will reduce the need for customers to follow up queries. The customer experience will be enhanced by a better website that is easier to navigate for use by both customers and staff. Moving through services establishes an approach and new skills that will be repeated. It will also allow us to develop and build a corporate view of shared customer information including equalities and customer feedback. This option will ensure each project has a sound business case and create sufficient resources to ensure the implementation of projects and ongoing support.

4.3 The third option is to provide holistic services through common transactions like a bereavement or change of address, and proactively join up services around customer groups. This would tackle the problem of customers repeating information and reduces duplication between services. It would offer small savings across many services that are likely to result in efficiencies and would lead to a longer period to pay back investment as savings emerge over time.

4.4 The final option was to combine two and three and prioritise services with frequent customer transactions and develop customer information for use across the board. However this would require an increased level of investment and added risks and complexities to deliver a larger programme of work.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

5.1 The new website underwent thorough user testing before going live in May 2013. This gave us valuable insights into the user experience which we have responded to in the new design. User testing will be a fundamental part of the way that we design online services in the future in line with the Community Engagement Framework.

5.2   Community engagement is an important element of the Customer Promise and we are working with frontline services and the Communities and Equality team to make better use of the feedback we receive. This will mean we are better informed to design services with citizens in mind.

6.   CONCLUSION

6.1   This report requests the approval of invest to save to deliver a programme of work to enhance access to services. This investment will result in savings and efficiencies both to individual services and the council as a whole, whilst improving and modernising the customer experience.

6.2   Projects will be assessed on individual merit through a governance framework, and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Finance & Resources is requested to make further investments for customer experience projects that result in savings.

7.   FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications

7.1   The roll-out of the CEM platform to support these projects requires technical development on a service by service basis and this comprises a significant proportion of the costs for the project. While these are one off investment costs they do not meet the accounting definition of capital expenditure and therefore need to be funded from revenue sources.

7.2   It is proposed to have a split funding model for these projects, part funded through one off contributions from the council's Modernisation Fund and part funded from service efficiencies. The business cases will take into account both cashable direct savings and non cashable efficiency gains. The maximum period to recover the service funded investment through cashable savings will be five years.

7.3   For the parking project one off costs of £0.273m are to be funded through a contribution from the Modernisation Fund of £0.150m, with the remainder of £0.123m to be met by internal financing and repaid by the service over five years. Some of the investment will include equipment and software which can be used for future CEM projects subject to individual business cases.

7.4   The revenue financial savings are expected to offset the internal financing repayments, and would generate additional cashable savings of £0.028m from 2018/19 onwards. However, from year 1 there would also be staff efficiency savings of £0.075m each year which are currently being treated as non-cashable but this will be kept under review to ensure that additional financial savings are delivered to support the council's budget wherever possible.

Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis   Date: 26/09/13

<u>Legal Implications:</u>

7.4   The council's general power of competence, granted under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, provides sufficient authority for the invest to save programme recommended in this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon   *Date: 13/09/13*

<u>Equalities Implications:</u>

7.5   An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for the Website Phase 2 Project and the recommendations will be incorporated into the Digital Customer Experience Programme.

7.6   Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out for each project based on the customer needs and the service offer.

7.7   The work has made links to the Digital Inclusion work with partners in the city that is being overseen by the City Management Board (CMB).

<u>Sustainability Implications:</u>

7.8   The move to more customer self service and remote access will have positive effects on the amount of paper forms and incoming post to council services, and the number of people travelling to and from council offices.

<u>Crime & Disorder Implications:</u>

7.9   The ability to share customer data across services offers an opportunity to minimise fraud, giving services more options to verify check identification.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Case Studies

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None