

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:**           **CABINET**

**DATE:**                   **TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2014**

**REPORT BY:**          **HEAD OF ICT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES**

**SUBJECT:**              **CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY UPDATE**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To update Members on the progress made with the implementation of the Customer Services Strategy.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 The Customer Services Strategy sets out the vision for improved customer service and access across the Council and a plan for implementation.

2.02 The Strategy was published in 2009 and included a four year plan which is now due for review. This report sets out what has been achieved over the previous four years and includes an overview of the future proposed direction for customer services that will be included in the next version of the strategy.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.01 Face to Face contact and Flintshire Connects**

During 2014, the Flintshire Connects Programme will see the establishment of new Connects Centres at Flint, Connah's Quay and Buckley. These will complement the first Connects Centre which opened at Holywell in November 2012. The projected opening of each Connects Centre is as follows:

- County Offices, Flint – March 2014
- Connah's Quay Library – June 2014
- Town Council Building, Buckley – July 2014

3.02 Overall good progress is being made on the Flintshire Connects programme. The construction works at County Offices, Flint are progressing according to the timetable, with scheduled completion at the end of February, 2014. Considerable work has taken place with colleagues at JobCentre Plus and North Wales Police with the view of developing an integrated reception delivering modern, public services. This will include a shared reception post with JobCentre Plus.

Work is planned to begin at Connah's Quay in January 2014 with the view that the new Flintshire Connects Centre will open in June 2014.

- 3.03 Following the allocation of additional funding within the 2013/14 Capital Programme we have been able bring forward plans for a fourth Flintshire Connects Centre in Buckley. The Buckley Town Council building has been identified for this purpose, with detailed drawings being developed, with a planning application being submitted in December 2013. It is proposed that Flintshire Connects Centre – Buckley will open in July 2014.
- 3.04 Flintshire Connects – Holywell opened in November 2012 and has proved to be a success with over 350 visits from customers each week. Customer feedback shows that customers are very satisfied with the service they receive at the centre. The Customer Services Advisers are able to deal with most enquiries at the first point of contact or where this is not possible customers are signposted as appropriate. Good working relationships have been established with the partner organisations and these have been further enhanced through involvement with the voluntary sector to help improve access to council services for those who have difficulty speaking English or Welsh. There has been an increase in the use of the agile working area by council staff making full use of the technology and facilities available.
- 3.05 **Channel Shift - Website and Digital Access**  
The Council's new website went live on 1 October; new Content Management System (CMS) technology will enable the Channel Shift project to move forward with its plan to increase the number of transactional services provided online. A 'digital workshop' will be held in the new year to benchmark the Council's position against key principles set out in the Society of IT Management (Socitm) "Better with Less" report which was recently published and sets out a set of principals, action and best practice for successful digital services. The facility to apply online for school admissions is a priority and will be taken forward in the new year. We will also be launching a mobile version of the website in the new year which provides a better customer experience for those using smart phones and tablets.
- 3.06 In early 2014 we will be undertaking a post implementation review of the new website taking account of feedback received, benchmarking information and annual Better Connected report which rates all local government websites across the UK. We also intend to hold some session with user groups as part of the review process to include customers, employees and members.
- 3.07 Flintshire's mobile app was launched in September 2013 and allows customers to contact the Council on Apple, Android and Blackberry devices. Flintshire is the first council in Wales to offer a fully bilingual

mobile app available for use across a range of mobile devices. Customers now have the choice to access council services whilst on the move at a time and place convenient to them. Following an initial 'settling in period' the app is now being promoted through a range of channels. Customer Services are dealing with incoming enquiries from the app and the intention is to develop the app further in the New Year with integration to back office systems and the facility for customers to make on-line payments.

**3.08 Social Media**

The corporate Twitter account is now being used far more proactively recognising the huge increase in use of social media. RSS feeds from the website have previously counted for the majority of 'tweets' but now the account is being managed more proactively to provide information relating to current events, service status and answer tweets, the number of 'followers' has increased by over 60% since May.

3.09 To increase the awareness of social media, a live question and answer session was held in December with Streetscene around preparations for winter and it is hoped similar sessions can be arranged in the new year to promote key activities, policies etc throughout the Council.

**3.10 Contact Centre**

The Corporate Contact Centre which was originally implemented to deal with all telephone and web enquiries relating to Streetscene services has been established for 18 months. The contact centre is integral to the success of the Streetscene service and this has proved to be the case during periods of bad weather last March with the exceptionally heavy snowfall and periods of heavy rainfall and wind during the year.

3.11 Other services considering use of the Contact Centre include:

- Customer Services – Registration Appointments and general enquiries
- Environment Management - General enquiries/streetscene enquiries.
- Libraries – General enquiries, book renewals, reservations
- Leisure – initially establishing a separate contact centre using same technology to enable future integration and staff flexibility to cover extended hours
- Older People Services – First Contact Team
- Public Transport – General enquiries, reporting damage/graffiti, Deeside shuttle bookings and school contracts

- Housing Income Enquires – now being dealt with by the Contact Centre
- Housing Asset Management – Separate Contact Centre in place but potential for greater integration
- Public Protection

3.12 The next steps are to work through the actual call volumes and processes in each department to determine where the greatest customer service improvements and cost savings will be realised through transfer of services to contact centre working. Lean process reviews are to be undertaken to ensure that any service transferred to contact centre has the most efficient process possible e.g. using call recording and scripting to replace paper application forms.

### 3.13 **Customer Service Standards**

The revised Customer Services Policy and Standards has been drafted. Subject to approval this will be finalised taking into account customer feedback as part of the consultation process. The proposed implementation date is April 2014.

### 3.14 **Customer Engagement**

A county wide public engagement exercise is currently being planned.

The aims of the exercise will be to:

- To help the public understand the financial pressures faced by the Council and the decisions it needs to make.
- To future proof options for later consideration by officers and elected members on the future of Council services.
- To inform decision making for the 2015/16 budget setting process.

3.15 Using a range of methodologies, a range of identified stakeholders will be asked to contribute their views and opinions on a range of pre determined themes.

3.16 It is expected that the exercise will take place early in 2014/15 in order for data analysis and feedback to be considered later in the summer.

### 3.17 **Customer Service Training**

The 'Customer Services Award' is currently being undertaken by Leisure Services; this is the third workbook produced in partnership with Coleg Cambria following a roll-out in Housing and services within Environment. The intention is to develop a fourth workbook in the New Year working alongside Adult & Children's Services. The training is a nationally recognised qualification and is accredited by OCR.

- 3.18 **Compliments, Concerns and Complaints**  
A 'Complaints Awareness' course has been developed for the workforce and the first session is due to be delivered by Coleg Cambria from January 2014. The course is designed to give an overview of the Compliments, Concerns and Complaints policy enabling employees to understand their role when receiving a compliment, concern or complaint. The course will also consider key skills needed when dealing with complaints.
- 3.19 **Refreshing the Customer Service Strategy**  
The strategy was published in 2009 and set out a vision for a four year plan for the direction of customer services. Significant progress has been achieved to meet this vision of how customers access our services.
- 3.20 We are now at the stage where we need to build on this strategy and look again to the future. A new strategy will be developed setting out our future vision and building on the successful progress made to date. We must also consider the increasing financial pressures that the organisation is facing and design a strategy that is deliverable.
- 3.21 A key focus for the new strategy will be how we can improve and expand our range of digital services via our new website. We know that this is the most cost effective method of customer access, with great potential for efficiencies; but also our customers expectations to do business with the council on-line are increasing. Obviously we mustn't forget individual needs and an understanding that many customers will prefer more traditional methods of contact such as face to face and telephone, and we need to also improve these access channels.
- 3.22 Socitm has produced the "Better with Less" report which provides valuable information to support our future vision for digital services. It does not tell us how to do it but provides examples of good practice and lessons learnt by other councils that have moved forward with this agenda.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 Members note the content of the report and the progress made in relation to the Customer Service Strategy.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 None directly from this report.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 None

## **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 Moving our customers away from traditional methods of contact and towards digital services will have a positive impact in terms of responding to customer expectations of a 24/7 service.

## **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 Consideration of all our customer's individual needs is integral to the customer services strategy and related projects.

8.02 The new website has been designed in full consultation with Shaw Trust which is an organisation that has been established to assess website suitability for people with a range of disabilities. The new content management system which supports the new website has improved features to ensure that we are providing a fully accessible website. These features were not previously available with the old technology.

8.03 The new mobile app and new website are fully bilingual ensuring our customers have equal choice in the English and Welsh languages.

## **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None directly from this report.

## **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 Ongoing consultation will be required with our customers and partners in the implementation of the Customer Service Strategy and future customer access projects.

10.02 Further consultation will be taking place with user groups regarding the design and content of the new website early in 2014.

## **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 Consultation has taken place on the new website and feedback has been used to make improvements.

11.02 There is ongoing consultation at Flintshire Connects – Holywell through a customer satisfaction questionnaire.

11.03 Increased use of 'Twitter' has opened up opportunities to consult with our customers on a range of topics.

## **12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985**  
**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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