

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2012**

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

SUBJECT: **CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY UPDATE**

1.00 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To update Cabinet 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.

3.00 **CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 **Customer Access Channel Shift**

This is a key project within the Flintshire Futures Programme with the objective of releasing efficiency savings by moving our customers to more cost effective ways of accessing the Council's information and services.

Priority services have been identified and lean reviews were carried out in February 2012 looking at the processes followed for two of these services, Planning and Concessionary Travel. Both reviews identified that access to these services could be improved both via the website and via the new contact centre and the Flintshire Connects centres to come; there were also potential efficiencies to be gained. Further development of the Expert Planning system is underway which will support Flintshire Connects staff to deal with planning services enquiries. It will be a scripted system providing answers to routine questions e.g. "Do I need planning permission?". Once tested and implemented the aim will be to launch a website version which will enable customers to access this on line. Work is also in hand to provide the concessionary travel service from Flintshire Connects centres and then via the website.

Meetings have taken place with all other service areas to discuss current customer contact and how customers are accessing services at present. A prioritised plan for Channel Shift is now being

developed focussing particularly on improving website content and improving on-line services.

3.02 Use of Social Media and Council “Apps”

Although the council has a presence on Facebook and Twitter we only use it to publish information. We do not currently allow customers to engage with the Council and services using these technologies. We have seen a huge growth in the use of social media since we published our strategy in 2010, to the extent that there are now 40 million Facebook users in the UK. On top of this we have seen a huge growth in devices such as Smartphones and iPads. Over the past 3 years 700,000 Apple apps have been published. We need to recognise that more and more of our customers are using these technologies on a day to day basis.

Later this year we will publish our first Flintshire App, an innovative facility with Public Protection which will allow reporting by customers directly via Smartphones. However, we need to start using these new technologies across the Council to improve customer access and engagement. Proposals for their use will be incorporated in an updated Strategy to be published early next year. In the mean time it is proposed that we extend the use of social media tools and other new technologies in targeted areas with targeted groups of customers.

3.03 Website Development

The Channel Shift project is supported by the procurement of a new web content management system (CMS). The current system has reached its limits in terms of developing a website which can support ambitious channel shift. A new CMS will make it easier to change web content, respond to the level of functionality expected by our customers and drive forward improvements. The procurement of the new CMS is a partnership project with other North Wales councils. Working in collaboration has the advantage of driving down costs, avoiding duplication of procurement related work and enables us to share information and processes with other councils. The procurement is currently in progress with an anticipated selection and contract award scheduled for October.

3.04 Alongside the CMS procurement the Web Development Group continues to meet and the focus has been on gathering information relating to forms used within the Council. The intention is wherever possible to convert these forms into electronic format (e-form) for use on the website offering customers the choice of electronic access to services and improving accessibility. All forms currently being used across the Council are being recorded on a centralised database. Further development will allow e-forms to integrate directly into back office systems removing the need for form content to be rekeyed into systems by administration staff making the transactions more efficient.

3.05 **Face to Face Contact**

The priority for improving face to face customer contact is the Flintshire Connects project. The contractor for the first Flintshire Connects centre in Holywell has been appointed and work has commenced on the refurbishment of the Old Town Hall. The planned opening date for Holywell is week beginning the 22nd October, 2012. The recruitment of Customer Service Advisors for Holywell is now complete and an intensive training programme will commence later this month.

A consultation and engagement plan is being developed with partner organisations particularly North Wales Police who will have a major presence in the Holywell centre. The plan will ensure coordinated engagement with the public, local members, other stakeholders and the media. An Invest to Save bid has been submitted to the Welsh Government jointly with North Wales Police to assist with the funding of Flintshire Connects and we are awaiting a decision on the bid which is expected shortly. If successful any funding received will be fully repayable to the Welsh Government. The intention of the Invest to Save fund is to assist organisations in accelerating change projects. A report will be presented to Cabinet during the next few months for consideration of future Flintshire Connects sites across the County.

3.06 **Complaints**

A new policy for Compliments, Concerns and Complaints was introduced on 1st April, 2012. This introduces a new complaints procedure based on the all Wales Complaints Model issued by Welsh Government. There is very little change to the stages within the process however there will be more focus on lessons learnt from complaints received. The policy is available on the website and new literature will shortly be published.

3.07 **Telephone Contact**

The Streetscene Contact Centre was introduced in March 2012. This happened at the same time as many major changes were being introduced within the Streetscene service and has been a steep learning curve for all staff involved.

Three members of staff who previously worked at the Queensferry Depot were assimilated into Customer Contact Officer posts and staff from other parts of the Council were recruited to the other 3 positions.

All telephone calls that were previously received by the Queensferry, Halkyn and Alltami Depots are now diverted to the Contact Centre (01352 701234). The telephone handling system is a significant improvement on the previous arrangements as all call information can be monitored. This allows weaknesses in call answering times to be detected immediately and additional customer service staff called upon to assist at busy times. Callers no longer hear the engaged tone

and calls are answered in the order they are received. Call recording facilities will be implemented in September which will provide further information on calls and will be available for future training. The information collected will be secure and strict arrangements to maintain confidentiality will be put in place.

The volume of calls that have been received since March outstripped expectations especially during the major operational changes to the waste collection service. The situation has been closely monitored and measures put in place to improve call answer times and quality and timeliness of information available to the contact centre team. As a result improvements have been made in call answering times and in reducing abandoned calls. However, there is still considerable work to improve back office procedures and communication between the Streetscene operational staff and the Contact Centre advisors.

3.08 Customer Services Training

The Customer Services Award continues to be rolled out across the Council with parts of the Environment Directorate now nearing completion. The next services to join will be Leisure Services, parts of Community Services and Human Resources.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Members note the content of the report and the progress made in implementing the Customer Services 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 Our strategy to move customers from traditional methods of accessing services to web and self service will have a positive environmental impact.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 Consideration of all of our customers in terms of their needs is integral to the Customer Service Strategy and related projects.

8.02 The Flintshire County Council Customer Service Award has been designed to accommodate all staff and take account of individual needs.

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 improvements.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation has taken place with our customers in relation to their preferences and levels of satisfaction with services received and access channels.

11.02 Consultation with Welsh Language and Equality groups has been undertaken as part of the Flintshire Connects project.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None.

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

Contact Officer: Denise Naylor
Telephone: 01352 702421
Email: denise.naylor@flinshire.gov.uk