



**CABINET – 13 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY 2024-2028: PROPOSED  
CONSULTATION**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

**PART A**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for consultation on the Council's draft new Customer Experience Strategy 2024-2028, appended to this report.
2. The report provides an outline of the draft Strategy and sets out the approach to the proposed consultation.

**Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that the Customer Experience Strategy be approved for consultation.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

4. It is a legal requirement for public bodies such as local authorities to consult residents, service users and staff on key strategies which might affect them. Consultation will strengthen the Customer Experience Strategy by ensuring that diverse views and ideas are incorporated, thereby reinforcing support for its implementation.
5. The consultation will also be an opportunity to hear from a range of people and organisations, including those representing people with protected characteristics and minority groups.

**Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

6. Subject to the Cabinet's approval it is intended that the consultation exercise will take place from 14 September to 10 November 2024.
7. The Scrutiny Commission will receive a report on the draft Strategy at its meeting on 6 November.
8. The Cabinet will receive a further report at its meeting on 17 December 2024 regarding feedback from the consultation exercise and presenting the final Strategy for approval.

## **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

9. The Customer Experience Strategy aligns with all five outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan (2022-26); Great Communities, Clean and Green, Safe and Well, Improved Opportunities and Strong economy and infrastructure. The Strategy also plays an enabling role in delivering the Customer Programme within the Council's Strategic Change Portfolio; recognised within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2028.

## **Resource Implications**

10. The consultation exercise will be managed through existing resources. It will be co-ordinated by the Customer Programme Team, led by the Head of Customer Service and will call upon all departments to engage with staff, service users and community groups.
11. The resources required to deliver the Strategy will be a combination of professionals from customer services, ICT and digital, learning and development, business intelligence, communications and individual service areas as part of business as usual. Temporary resource from within the Transformation Unit is in place, using spend to save from Transformation Reserves; this resource is currently working with staff across the Council as part of the Customer Programme Team to ensure a sustainable approach is established, with clear actions and accountable owners from across the Council.
12. The Council has a number of existing technical solutions it uses to handle customer contact, including Microsoft for email and telephony, as well as various online customer platforms and portals which support online form completions and some customer account activity. There are some functional gaps within existing offerings and therefore it is likely that the Council will need to increase its investment in its digital capabilities in order to deliver the necessary actions that will derive from the Customer Experience strategy, such as improved communications through the use of automation where appropriate.
13. Where services require a considerable step change in the way they operate to align with the principles within the Strategy; for example those with limited (if any) online offerings or with considerable customer service dissatisfaction, there may be investment required to support such improvement (both in terms of technical expertise and solutions). Where this is the case, service areas will be expected to outline the proposed opportunity and financial implications through developing business cases that set out clearly any return on investment. Robust governance that provides opportunity for assurance and challenge on any proposals made will be part of this process. A similar approach has been taken so far, with financial savings relating to customer efficiencies achieved, total cashable savings are approximately £200,000 per annum. Activity is underway to determine what other efficiencies will contribute to the MTFS savings target of £640,000. A combination of existing

service budgets and one-off Transformation Reserve may be needed to secure the long term savings although such detail requires working through within individual project activities.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

14. This report will be circulated to all members of the Council.

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

15. This is the Council's first Customer Experience Strategy. It aims to formalise with employees and people who engage with its services, the Council's positive vision for its customers experience and its commitment to continuously improve. It also sets out how customers can support the Authority in achieving its vision that "People will be able to communicate with our services quicker and easier, through modern and accessible ways".
16. The draft Strategy has been developed with input from a range of stakeholders, including managers and operational staff of frontline services, as well as customers who have been in recent contact with the Council via telephone, face-to-face and the website in recent months. Informal engagement activity has provided an understanding of the current levels of customer service satisfaction, as well as customer contact preferences. This has been used alongside quantitative data on current customer contact behaviours.
17. The need for a Customer Experience Strategy has become increasingly apparent since the Council embarked on several pilot projects in 2023 and 2024 as part of the Customer Programme, (which has been seeking to trial new ways to be more efficient and effective in how it interacts with its customers). Learning from initial projects has indicated that by improving customer services and in ensuring there is a consistent and transparent approach across the Authority there will also be benefits for financial efficiency.

### **National and Local Context**

18. National and local public services continue to score worst in terms of customer satisfaction, and the post-pandemic world has seen digital advancements redefining customer expectations.
19. Pressure on the County Council continues to grow; the Medium Term Financial Strategy funding gap will grow to over £80m by 2027/28, the population in Leicestershire has risen by almost 10% since 2011 and in 2023/24 the level of complaints the Council received increased by 5% on the previous year (the Annual Complaints and Compliments report is also being discussed at this Cabinet meeting).
20. Through the Council's Customer Programme, several projects have trialled new approaches including the Blue Badge Project, School Admissions and Adult Social Care, projects are still in progress. Principles that have underpinned the approaches used are now set out in the new draft Customer Experience Strategy. Through customer insight, process and technology change, projects have supported improved customer experience whilst also saving the Council money. For example -

- within the adult social care services, the improvements made has seen the overall average call queuing time reduce from just over 19 minutes on average down to under 9 minutes since February this year;
- complaints in school admissions have reduced significantly with the proportion of customers needing to contact the Council post-application reducing by approximately half during academic year 2023/24 compared to the previous year;
- the average end-to-end processing time of a blue badge application reducing from 7.9 days down to 3 days, over the past 12 months. This timeframe is expected to reduce further as a result of a new and improved case management system due to go live this autumn.

There is more work to be done to get a consistent level of customer service across all the Council's services; and this new Strategy aims to enable this.

### **Key principles of the draft Customer Experience Strategy**

21. The Strategy is based around the following key principles:

- Customer focused:** building a culture that is aligned with good customer experience
- Accessible and inclusive:** designing services accessible to those who need them, with clear and comprehensible content
- Transparency:** in the Council's decision making and communication
- Efficiency and effectiveness:** in maximising value, addressing barriers to deliver good quality services
- Continuous improvement:** in learning, innovation, service redesign, performance, impact, and results
- Sustainable design:** in considering the environmental, social, and economic impact of the Council's customer service.

These principles are expanded on within the full Strategy document. The Council would monitor its effectiveness via customer feedback and data monitoring.

22. A key mechanism for delivering the Strategy will be through a customer service blueprint, which will include:

- continuous improvement actions
- investing in technology, to ensure that growing services can provide a sustainable offer
- spending less money in the long term, through reducing the volume of contact that requires a real time human conversation
- the way some customers will access services will change
- embedding a customer centric mindset in the workplace
- using customer insight data to improve customer service
- ensuring Elected Members (Councillors) can play their part in helping customers, and supporting them to do so

23. The Strategy will apply to all front-facing services, and not just those that sit within the Customer Service Centre. Support and focus will be on those areas with high numbers of customers, for example (but not limited to):
- Children’s Early Help and Social Care
  - Registration Services
  - Traded Services
  - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
24. The above is in addition to areas linked to the Customer Service Centre; Adult Social Care, Highways, Transport, Waste, Blue Badge, Concessionary Travel and School Admissions.

### **Consultation**

25. It is proposed to hold an 8-week consultation exercise on the draft Customer Experience Strategy. Subject to the Cabinet’s approval this will commence on 14 September and run until 10 November 2024.
26. The consultation will use a variety of methods from on-line surveys to virtual and face-to-face meetings. The objective of the consultation is twofold: to seek comments on the draft Strategy and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the key issues confronting both customers and staff. Specific community organisations of and for people with protected characteristics will be encouraged to participate in the consultation. Existing customers will be made aware of the consultation, through information on the main banner of the Council’s website, texting a snapshot of customers who have recently been in touch by phone, promoting the consultation in Leicestershire Libraries, locality offices and in County Hall reception, and also through making contact with leads of key voluntary groups to provide information about the consultation and request slots to speak with key groups.
27. The draft Strategy will be made available in different formats on request and a summary version will be made available alongside the full document.
28. The Scrutiny Commission will receive a report at its meeting on 6 November as part of the consultation process and its comments will be included in the report to the Cabinet in December.

### **Equality Implications**

29. The development of the Strategy will have a positive impact on equality, diversity, and inclusion for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and more widely. This is because the Strategy will take a data driven approach to understand the needs of the Council’s customers better and equip employees with relevant training. The Strategy also sets out to understand better the various channels different groups need to access the Council’s services and where it can automate in some areas to spend more time on complex matters that require face to face or phone calls, so no one is digitally excluded.

30. An Equality Impact Assessment of the draft Strategy and consultation approach has been undertaken. It concluded that the Strategy should enhance equality for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. The EIA will be revised following the consultation and submitted to the Cabinet.

### **Human Rights Implications**

31. There are no specific human rights implications from this Strategy.

### **Appendix**

Draft Customer Service Strategy.

### **Background Papers**

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-2026

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-plans/the-strategic-plan>

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2028

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=7305>

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