Report for:	Overview Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Customer Charter Update
Date:	3rd September 2024
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Adrian England, Portfolio Holder for Transformation and People
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Customer Charter (powerpoint slide)
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	IVR – Interactive Voice Recognition CSU – Customer Service Unit SLA – Service Level Agreements DBC – Dacorum Borough Council FOI – Freedom of Information

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Corporate Priorities	Ensuring efficient, effective, and modern service delivery
Wards affected	ALL
Purpose of the report:	1. To provide OSC with an update on the work delivered to date to help embed our Customer Charter internally and preparations to launch this

	externally in line with National Customer Service Week in October 2024.
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. Comments on the proposal to launch the Customer Charter externally with customers in line with National Customer Service Week in October 2024.
Period for post policy/project review:	

1 Introduction/Background:

1.1 The global coronavirus pandemic has forced us to change how we deliver services to our residents, businesses, and visitors and how we transact with them. It triggered an inevitable change in customer demand, behaviours, and expectations where they had to access services in different ways.

1.2 Last year, we launched our Customer Strategy which sets out our customer vision "to put the customer at the centre of our services in order to provide a positive and effective customer experience, and to empower our staff so they can deliver consistent and quality Council services."

1.3 Our strategy clearly sets out our vision, principles and approach to customer engagement which will enable us to consistently design and deliver our services with the customer at the heart of everything we do, whilst managing the ongoing financial pressures that Dacorum faces. Our principles are: -

    1.3.1 To ensure we are improving our digital offering
    1.3.2 Provide a consistent and improved customer experience
    1.3.3 Redesign and deliver our services with the customer at the heart of this
    1.3.4 A single front door into the organisation for our customers
    1.3.5 Remove duplication and manual intervention

1.4 Dacorum's Customer Strategy is not a 'digital only' strategy. The council wants to improve services by providing customers with the option of transacting digitally with us. However, we want to redirect the capacity that this creates to provide a more tailored service to vulnerable customers who need more targeted support.

1.5 To support the embedding of our Customer Strategy and our vision, we developed a Customer Charter, consisting of a series of commitments to help us get the basics right and improve our level of customer service.

1.6 Our Customer Charter clearly outlines what we as an organisation aim to deliver for our customers and what service they can expect from us. It also sets out what we need from our customers to be able to deliver our services effectively. Detailed work has been underway to support the embedding of our Customer Charter across the organisation, the details of this can be found later in the report. This is the first step in the wider transformation we are undertaking to ensure we get the basics right and support the behavioural change with our staff.

1.7   We are now developing a plan to launch this externally with our residents and aim to deliver this by October 2024 in line with National Customer Service Week.

2   Key Issues/proposals/main body of the report:

2.1   We undertook customer engagement when developing our Customer Strategy and feedback from customers tells us that our customers lack confidence that enquiries will be dealt with effectively and often phone to chase for updates. This leads to increasing levels of failure demand as we are not being clear of our processes, response times or providing proactive updates to our customers. Our customers also told us that our telephone systems do not work all the time and that their experiences of customer service are not meeting their expectations.

2.2   Our Customer Charter is the foundation of achieving our principles set out in our Customer Strategy and addressing the feedback we received from our customers as part of the Ignite findings. The importance of this can be summarised into the four key benefits below:

2.3   Improves customer satisfaction:
        2.3.1   helps customers to understand what to expect,
        2.3.2   reduces misunderstandings and frustrations,
        2.3.3   encourages a customer centric approach, and
        2.3.4   reduces failure demand.

2.4   Builds trust and confidence:
        2.4.1   demonstrates our reliability as an organisation i.e. we will do what we say we will, and
        2.4.2   demonstrates our commitment to high quality standards.

2.5   Engages and empowers our customers:
        2.5.1   creates a collaborative relationship with our customers and us as an organisation.

2.6   Enhances transparency and accountability:
        2.6.1   clearly communicates the standard we are committed to, and
        2.6.2   ensures we meet our timescales / look for opportunities to improve.

2.7   Below are our commitments as outlined in our Customer Charter, along with what this means for our customers and how these will help us improve our customer service.

2.8   **We will communicate with you in a way that is clear, respectful, and accessible –**
        2.8.1   We will ensure that all information we communicate to our customers is in plain English and in a format that is accessible to all.
        2.8.2   This will enable customers to understand what we need from them much easier and reduce any confusion.

2.9   **We will strive to understand and take ownership of your enquiry and will direct you to the right organisation if we cannot help directly –**
        2.9.1   We will personally deal with our customers and ensure that if we are not the right organisation, we pass their enquiry to the right person so they can get it resolved.
        2.9.2   This will make customers feel that they are looked after and that they can trust us.

2.10   **We will explain, in an easy-to-understand way, what we need from you, advise you of our timescales and inform you of any delays**

2.10.1   We will be transparent with our customers; from the moment they enter our organisation to when their request has been completed.

2.10.2   When customers receive clear, concise, and relevant information, their needs and expectations are more likely to be met. This leads to a more positive experience and higher satisfaction levels.

2.11   **We will improve access to our services by making more of these available online –**

2.11.1   We will provide as much self-serve capabilities for our customers so they can interact with us any time that is convenient for them, on any device, anywhere.

2.11.2   This leads to shorter wait times for those who do need direct assistance and allows us to focus more resources on those customers that need more support

2.12   **We will be responsive to your needs and adapt our communication style and actions accordingly –**

2.12.1   We recognise the importance of not treating all our customers the same and adapting where we need to consider the individual's needs.

2.12.2   We must treat our customers with respect and ensure that they can still have their issue resolved. This leads to customers feeling respected, supported and builds a level of trust.

2.13   Significant work has been underway over the last 12 months to ensure that we have embedded our commitments and ensure that our customers can begin to feel the benefits of our Customer Charter once this is launched.

2.14   **Updating our IVR telephone system –** we worked with different services to review all of our scripts, ensuring that the information we provided was up to date, removed unnecessary steps to make it quicker for the customer to get to the information they needed and also introduced text links for customers who want to self-serve and complete what they need online. We have also updated internal procedures to ensure these will be kept up to date moving forward.

2.15   **Mapping our timescales for key transactions across DBC** – we worked with different services to understand where our highest demand transactions are, our timescales for completing key transactions, and how we communicate this to customers upfront. This will ensure they are clear regarding our timescales and are not chasing for updates. We have included this information as part of our IVR and website improvement projects, so that we are clearly communicating our timescales to our customers up front.

2.16   **Developing templates –** after the mapping of our timescales, we identified an opportunity to create a template for services to use with their customers to communicate any delays in processing their request/task. This is an interim measure whilst we redesign services and this becomes automated in the future, however, it is important to recognise that this causes significant failure demand in our system with customers continuously chasing for updates where we have not communicated delays with them or kept them informed of progress.

2.17   **Updating our website** – we worked with services who have the highest website visits to ensure our information was up to date, clear, structured, and easy to understand and follows our Web Content Guidance. Here are some examples - [Council Tax (dacorum.gov.uk)](#) and [Pest control (dacorum.gov.uk)](#) and [Grass, hedge and shrub cutting (dacorum.gov.uk).](#)

2.18 **Customer Service Training** – we are progressing customer service training for all staff across the Council to help them understand the importance each of us plays in our roles in delivering good customer service, both to internal and external customers.

2.19 **Delivering the wider Future Dacorum Transformation programme –** we have recently purchased a new digital platform and are in delivery phase of our transformation programme to help improve online access to our services and provide customers with better self-serve capabilities. Our transformation programme is now making considerable progress and have already started projects involving redesign of Complaints/FOI, Garages, Waste, Revenues & Benefits and Health & Safety services.

2.20 Whilst the introduction of our Customer Charter will benefit our customers, it is also important to consider the internal benefits that this will achieve, some of which are listed below

2.21 **Reduction in failure demand / avoidable contact** – we have identified significant levels of failure demand across the organisation which is having an impact on resources to respond to this demand.
    2.21.1 Our customers are continuously chasing us for progress updates where they have not heard from us after submitting a request or due to a delay where we promised to do something by a certain date and have not achieved this.
    2.21.2 Being pro-active and communicating potential delays with customers and being clear on our processes will help reduce this level of failure demand and avoidable contact.

2.22 **More time to deal with the work –** our Customer Services Unit and back-office teams will have more time to be able to support those customers who need it most, as they will be spending less time chasing for progress updates from back-office services on behalf of customers.

2.23 **Eventually lead to quicker responses** – our longer-term goal is to see a reduction in our timescales to process requests, as our time and resources will be better focused.

2.24 **Reduction in complaints** – we sometimes get complaints due to lack of progress updates or not completing something by the date that we agreed. Being proactive, keeping our customers informed and being clear from the outset will help to reduce such complaints.

2.25 **Reputational benefits** - we want our customers to see Dacorum Borough Council as a Council that really supports, delivers, and listens to their residents to help them live the best way that they can in their individual circumstances.

2.26 **Future Dacorum** - Our transformation programme is the mechanism for us delivering the implementation of our Digital Platform. We will be working with teams across the council who deliver services to our customers over our 3-year programme to redesign our processes, delivering them more effectively and efficiently with the support of digitalisation.

2.27 **Corporate Plan** – Our revised corporate plan is being launched in Autumn 2024, setting out our vision and priorities. The launch of our Customer Charter will be an early deliverable on the back of this launch

3   Options and alternatives considered:

3.1 We are planning to launch our Customer Charter in line with National Customer Service Week which takes place in the first week of October. This is a fantastic opportunity to launch this with our customers, showing how we are committed to improving service delivery. We already have a project team in place with communications team support and will ensure communications are ready in preparation for the launch if approved by Cabinet.

4 Consultation:

4.1 Work has been undertaken with our customers in the initial design stages of this charter to listen to their thoughts/ideas and ensure that this was designed collaboratively.

4.2 We have also consulted with staff internally, ensuring that they support this being embedded across all teams and the understand the importance of this as part of our Customer Strategy.

4.3 Members of CLT and SLT have also been consulted throughout and support our recommendation to launch this externally in October 2024.

5 Financial and value for money implications:

5.1 None.

6 Legal Implications:

6.1 None.

7 Risk implications:

7.1 Whilst there are several benefits our Customer Charter will bring to the Council; it is also important to consider the risks and how these can be mitigated.

7.2 **Staff not adhering to our commitments** – our staff are pivotal to ensuring that our commitments are adhered to, helping us improve our service delivery. Failure to support our staff to understand their role in this can lead to them not adhering to our commitments. To mitigate this risk, we will provide regular training for staff to understand and implement the charter effectively. We will also regularly report to CLT and SLT as we will monitor and evaluate our performance against the charter to identify and address any gaps or issues. We will also analyse complaints and level of failure demand to help us identify any further gaps or issues that we need to address.

7.3 **Reputational risk** - Failure to adhere to our customer charter can erode public trust and confidence in the council's ability to manage and serve the community effectively. Negative experiences shared by our customers can lead to bad publicity, impacting the council's reputation. To mitigate this risk, we will establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback from our customers to continually improve and ensure that we are adhering to our commitments.

7.4 **Inconsistent service delivery** - Without a well-embedded customer charter, different departments may deliver services inconsistently, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction among our customers.

Our transformation programme and the roll out of the Digital Platform will mitigate this risk, as our services will be designed consistently and customer centric.

8   Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

8.1   Community Impact Assessments on Council activities are carried out by relevant services with responsibility for those activities. A separate Community Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of this report.

8.2   There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

9   Sustainability implications: (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

9.1   There will be no negative impact to sustainability.

10   Council infrastructure: (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets, and other resources

10.1   There will be no impact to council infrastructure.

11   Conclusions:

11.1   In conclusion, the above paper has outlined the work undertaken to date to ensure that our Customer Charter commitments are embedded internally in preparation for launching externally with our residents.

11.2   If approved by Cabinet, we will continue to work with our Communications Team to ensure that we are prepared to launch this in National Customer Service Week in October 2024 to ensure that it is positively received by our residents.