

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Mark Robinson – Executive Member for Customer and Performance
Maxine O’Mahony – Executive Director for Strategy and Governance

To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3rd June 2021
Breckland District Council 8th July 2021

Author: Adele Newsome - Customer Experience Manager

Subject: Customer Service Review

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to obtain approval to proceed with the implementation of the proposed structure changes to the Customer Services Team following the service review.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That the Council approves the implementation of the revised staffing structure for the Customer Services Team.

Recommend to FULL COUNCIL:

- 2) That the Council approves the implementation of the revised staffing structure for the Customer Services Team as detailed in this report.

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Prior to Covid, the service was about to embark on a service review aimed at driving the delivery of the council’s Customer Access Strategy (see vision below), this was paused along with all non-critical services and projects. At this point, the team were office-based, with a culture focused on customer excellence (high satisfaction ratings) but with opportunities to improve, especially around performance and demand management.

Vision

‘To provide high quality and easy-to-use services that are designed with the customer in mind’

By 2022, our aim is to:

- Make services available **24/7**, from **any device customers choose**, and through a variety of channels (Choice and convenience)
- Provide an online experience **so good, people choose to contact us in this way** – encouraging more people to self-serve (Digital by design)
- Offer extra **help and support to those that need it** - making sure no-one is left behind (Targeted support)
- Be a council that **listens to - and learns from - its customers** to provide services they not only need, but want (Customer-focused)

1.2 During Covid, customers have been forced to contact us in different ways, thereby accelerating channel shift and some of our roadmap deliveries. Within a matter of weeks, Customer Contact became a virtual call centre, able to operate from anywhere using new technology, some channels were reduced or re-focused to support our Covid response (phone menu/operating times).

1.3 As part of our Covid response and recovery planning, we have reviewed how Customer Services changed in response to the challenges of the Covid pandemic:

- Revised ways of working
- Lessons learnt

1.4 We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to build on the momentum of how our customers interact with us as a council. To support these changes, we need a team structure and ways of working that will enable the team to effectively manage changing demand (such as longer, more complex calls related to benefits and housing issues, or providing more contact channels to meet customer expectations) and optimise its productivity.

2.0 OPTIONS

2.1 Approve the new Customer Access service model as highlighted in this report, enabling the service to deliver efficiencies and continuous service improvements.

2.2 No change to the structure of the Customer Services Team. This would not provide the required level of efficiency savings or deliver the other benefits outlined in this report.

2.3 Approve a different revised structure to that proposed in this report – the implications of any proposed alternative structure would need to be assessed and reported back to members. In addition, a further period of staff consultation would likely be required. As such, this option would result in further delay.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 **Create senior leadership capacity to:**

- Drive a **high-performing culture** focused on productivity, as well as customer experience
- Improve use of **customer insight** to manage demand and reduce avoidable contacts and failure demand
- Embed **customer excellence** across the council through closer working with other council services
- Increase **digital access to services** for customers through Artificial Intelligence, social media, web chat and assisted service

3.2 **Attract and retain high calibre staff, by:**

- Offering greater career progression opportunities (by creating new Support roles)
- Helping Customer Access Officers achieve their full potential (by providing more 121 support and mini teams, within one larger that will remain managed on a day-to-day basis by the leadership team)
- Providing targeted training and development opportunities (by creating a Lead Role that will include the responsibility for Learning and Development within the team)

3.3 **What does this mean for our customers?**

Our customers have been on a journey with us through the coronavirus pandemic and have adapted – by necessity – to the changes that we were encouraging through our Customer Access Strategy. This new structure, together with our plans to introduce more automation through Artificial Intelligence, will help us continue to take them along on that journey:

- **For customers with online access** – support will be available to them any time of the day via our digital assistant which will initially be available on our website 24/7.

- **For customers who prefer to contact us by telephone** but are still comfortable to self-serve – we will be able to support them any time of the day via our digital assistant which is planned to be available from early 2022.
- **For customers who want to talk to an officer over the phone** – we can support them on the phone between 9-5 or where more appropriate offer a pre-booked telephone appointment at a more convenient time.
- **For customers who cannot access online services**, or who struggle to contact us during office hours – we can support them with dedicated evening appointments.
- **For customers who prefer to talk to an officer face-to-face** – we can support them with video conference calls or alternatively arrange an appointment to see them face to face.

4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- 4.1 Reduction in overall staffing costs to meet the £80,000 efficiency saving set for 21/22.
- 4.2 The proposed structure builds more resilience and development opportunities within the team with roles deputising for each other and some roles becoming a flexible resource to call onto channels where there may be period of unforeseen high demand.
- 4.3 The proposed structure allows capacity for the Lead roles to manage performance consistently and effectively within their own teams, along with the Senior Lead who can be an active part in understanding customer demand. Led by the Customer Experience Manager, the leadership team will work together to develop our new Digital Assistant functionality (part of a new Artificial Intelligence project)
- 4.4 With a Senior Lead in place to manage day-to-day operations, the Customer Experience Manager will be supported to fulfil their more strategic brief of working with other council teams to redesign services around customer need and insight, to make sure they are both effective and efficient.
- 4.5 The proposed structure is also designed to encourage a culture of high performance and excellent customer service, by making sure the Lead roles have the capacity and support to create a positive and productive working environment.
- 4.6 Customer satisfaction will remain high as by creating more leadership capacity, the Service will also be able to proactively support, and quality assure customer communications to ensure they are clear, easy to understand and provided in a timely way.

5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.1 **Constitution & Legal**

- 5.1.1 The review has been conducted in accordance with the Council's policies and has been subject to advice and guidance from HR specialists throughout to ensure that the recommendations are fully compliant with employment legislation. The Trade Union has

been fully involved in the process to date and this will continue throughout the rest of the process.

- 5.1.2 Staffing matters are non-executive functions and therefore reserved to the Council for decision.

5.2 Contracts

- 5.2.1 The proposals will result in some changes to contracts of employment within the Team.

5.3 Corporate Priorities

5.3.1 Vision that aligns with the Customer Access Strategy

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5.4 Equality and Diversity / Human Rights

- 5.7.1 The process has and will continue to be carried out in accordance with the Council’s Equality and Diversity policies and procedures to ensure a fair and transparent process is provided to all affected parties.

5.5 Financial

- 5.5.1 Please see Appendix A Proforma B

Within year 2 21-22 there is budgeted a small shortfall of the efficiency target set of £23,879, however within the current structure vacancies within the service have been held which should enable this shortfall to be met.

Further efficiency targets have been set for year 3 and year 4, totalling £162,109 across the two years. To realise these savings the Artificial Intelligence will need to be implemented on the telephony system in 2022 as planned. Within the proposed structure there will be a number of fixed term posts to enable this to happen through natural attrition, preventing any redundancy costs.

5.6 Health & Wellbeing

- 5.9.1 All staff affected by this review have been supplied with support throughout

5.7 Staffing

- 5.13.1 As set out in the report there is a reduction of 3.87 in overall FTE, however due to fixed term contracts and vacant posts within the service there are no redundancies because of the review.

5.8 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

- 5.14.1 Consultation with staff in accordance with HR rules and with internal service users

6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

- 6.1 All are affected as the Customer Team delivers services across the district.

7.0 ACRONYMS

7.1 Covid means Coronavirus.

Background papers: - None

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Key Decision: N/A

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Proforma B
Appendix B Current Structure Roles in Scope Only
Appendix C Proposed Structure Roles in Scope Only