Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested[1] and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.

This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.

Issue: Draft Customer Experience Strategy

Lead Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Community and Corporate Services

Date response requested:[2] 27 February 2024

Response to report:
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[1] Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received
[2] Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

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Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
That the Council reviews within the Customer Experience Strategy - and more widely - its use of the word 'customers' as the preferred term to refer to those in receipt of collectively paid-for public services.	Partially accepted	When carrying out the internal engagement for this strategy (November 2023 to January 2024) we engaged over 250 employees to review the term 'customer' and have reflected responses in a word cloud infographic in the strategy (page 8) exploring all the terms we use to describe the people we serve. The final definition shared in the strategy (page 9) defines customer as "any individual, group or organisation that interacts with or receives assistance, support or guidance from the council". This broad definition covers everyone, including those in receipt of services paid for by the public. A recent intranet article, posted on the 14th of August, covering the customer experience strategy outlined the range of customers that the council has from residents to road users and business's which showcased the broad scope of the definition. We plan to discuss this further internally to finalise a definition for the council.

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That the Council takes further measures to increase public understanding of its financial limitations	Accepted	Within the strategy (page 7) we have reflected on the increased demand for services with the limited budget available. This requires a shift in approach towards customers self-serving where appropriate which will direct the council to focus on more complex cases that require further support. This reduction in overall demand through a greater use of self-service will ensure we can deliver consistent customer service within finance limitations. We have included a graphic, also on page 7, which outlines how the council will reduce overall demand such as better early intervention, signposting and greater use of partners. This will help those who read the strategy understand the measures the council are taking to meet the challenges currently faced. Separate to the strategy the consultation and engagement team have created budget simulator exercises which have enabled customers to try and set their own council budgets. They have also used this tool to engage young people in conversations around public finance. A budget for 24/25 was simulated by 1300 people including 88 secondary school children. There were also 140 online feedback forms submitted. For the 25/26 budget, there have been over 1000 submissions using the budget simulator tool.
That the Council works more closely with district/city and town/parish councils to reduce for residents the impact of the complexity of multiple layers of local authority	Accepted	We have identified this internally as an issue and have recently launched our Oxfordshire Councils Charter with the districts, towns and parishes. This framework will support further conversations on improving customer experience across Oxfordshire.

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		As part of the customer experience action plan, we are working with OCC communications team and partners to improve understanding around the services that the council and our partners offer through social media/resident engagement. Finally, an upgrade to our telephony system to an omni-channel approach (phone, email, WhatsApp etc) in November has the possibility to improve auto-redirection of customers to the appropriate service. A further update on this functionality can be provided when the new system is live.
That the Council identifies the steps it can reasonably take to extend improvements in service standards to subcontractors.	Partially accepted	Since going live with the strategy, we have met with individual directorates including Environment and Place which use a large number of subcontractors to promote the principles. We have a communications plan for the strategy internally which includes all service areas and this will allow us to embed the principles to all colleagues and subcontractors. We may explore adding information on the customer experience strategy to our subcontractor's induction period but this will be a wider piece of work.
That the Council monitors the effectiveness of its complaints-handling as part of its Customer Experience Strategy.	Accepted	Following feedback from this scrutiny committee we added a fifth principle to our strategy around learning from feedback. We have a dedicated improving the customer experience project to review and unify the complaints process and system which is currently live. An update on the new process/system will be shared once available. Regular updates around corporate complaints are currently shared through the business management and monitoring report.

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That the Council includes within its profiles of user groups those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and those for whom English is a second or other language.	Accepted	When engaging for the strategy respondents were from a range of places across the county. The 3 postcode areas we received most feedback from, were: OX16 - Banbury area (22%), OX4 - East Oxford area, including Cowley, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill (19%), and OX28 – Witney area (9%), which coincide with where we carried out in person engagement. (The engagement report for the strategy has a postcode map.) These areas include some of our most deprived wards in the county. We have committed to doing more in our action plan including • Engaging in comprehensive research that encompasses a wide range of demographics, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and abilities when designing our services • Partner with local organisations, community leaders, and advocacy groups to leverage their insights which will provide context and help bridge gaps • Invest in multilingual support and translation software, clear signage, and accessible technology We are working with the co production lead in the council to engage with seldom heard groups including English not as a first language and socio-economically disadvantaged groups when designing future customer-experience processes. In the action plan we committed to creating user profiles for training and designing process around our customers. A further update on progress will be provided at the end of year 1 of the strategy.