

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **19 December 2019**

Title: **Customer Satisfaction Action Plan Progress**

Portfolio Area: **Customer First – Cllr Nicky Hopwood**

Wards Affected: **All Wards**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision) **After Call In 2 January 2020**

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Executive:

- 1. Note and comment on the progress made to date in improving customer satisfaction in particular the increased Customer Satisfaction scores.**
- 2. Support the following next steps:**
 - i. Appoint a Customer Service Improvement Manager**
 - ii. Review complaint handling**
 - iii. Continue customer focussed staff meetings, performance monitoring and training**
 - iv. Replace customer handling software**
 - v. Achieve an uplift in customer satisfaction by 5.7 points in the next Institute of Customer Service benchmarking survey**
 - vi. Continue progress reporting**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report is presented by the Executive Lead for Customer Satisfaction and Improvement and details progress made since September 2019 on improving customer satisfaction.
- 1.2 The report also includes recommended next steps to continue to improve the customer experience by further building on the Council's customer satisfaction scores and continued improvements to Council services to pre-empt customer needs and manage expectations

2. Background

- 2.1 In October and November 2018 Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Executive resolved to note the results from the Council's 2018 Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey, and endorsed an action plan to improve customer service. The action plan endorsed repeating the survey in autumn 2019.
- 2.2 The Executive resolved in June 2019 that a Customer Satisfaction Progress Report be presented to the Executive each quarter. This report therefore provides an overview of progress made since September 2019 when a report was last presented to Executive.
- 2.3 Results from the Council's 2019 Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey were presented to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 21 November 2019 with a proposed way forward to improve results further. The Panel endorsed the approach presented which can be found in section 5 of this report.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 In September 2019 preparations began for the Council to launch its second Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Survey, results from the survey can be found at Appendix A. When the Council conducted the survey last year it pledged to improve results across the board but in particular deliver the following:
- *Outcome 1 - Improvement in overall benchmarking scores*
 - *Outcome 2 - Improvement in 'right first time'*
 - *Outcome 3 - Improvement in 'keeping customers informed'*
- 3.2 **Outcome 1 - 2019 Result**
The Council achieved an *overall* 6.6 point improvement to 64.9 points whereas the average local council score in 2019 has dropped by 2.6 points to 60.8 points. Therefore making South Hams District and West Devon Borough Councils' score **4.1 points higher** than the national local council average.
- 3.3 **Outcome 2 – 2019 Result**
The Council achieved an 11.8% improvement in *delivering right first time services*, resulting in a score of 53.1%. Therefore bucking the national downward trend and making South Hams District and West Devon Borough Councils' score **0.5% higher** than the national council average in 2019.
- 3.4 **Outcome 3 – 2019 Result**
The Council achieved only a 1 point increase in *keeping customers informed*, bringing its score to 6 points. Therefore making South Hams District and West Devon Borough Councils' score **0.2 points lower** than the national council average in 2019.
- 3.5 It is important to note that these results have been achieved without any additional resources. Furthermore, the progress made

is considered a significant achievement considering that the Institute of Customer Services own reports show that nationally, all sectors saw a reduction in customer satisfaction by 0.8 points compared to the same period last year.

3.6 Other achievements in the past 3 months

A significant number of improvements have been made to the Council's website, there is still much work in progress but the following list gives a flavour of the types of changes being made:

- Creating of "contact us" pages for all services
- Repairing broken links, display issues and spelling/grammar errors
- Improving navigation, ensuring each button "does what it says on the tin"
- Simplifying planning pages to provide information on what to do, before, during and after an application.
- Consolidation of election information to just one page, including a dynamic contact us facility whereby users can select various drop downs and be directed to the correct information.
- Switched missed bin reporting forms straight to the contractor, cutting out us as the middle man and thereby providing customers with more timely and accurate information
- Removal of old documents, images, links and news articles
- Monitoring search terms and creating new pages where needed
- Providing statistics and information to services about page use, downloads and site behaviours for service providers to hone their pages accordingly.
- Updating coding to comply with accessibility standards
- Reorganisation of Council Tax and Benefits pages and testing of new forms prior to going live
- Creation of a dedicated Climate Change website

3.7 Staff Away Days

These were held on various dates throughout November ensuring the entire workforce had an opportunity to attend a day. A large focus of the day was customer service with staff being encouraged to put themselves in the shoes of our customers and try applying for a range of services online. Feedback from these sessions was invaluable with staff realising that there is much room for improvement in many of our processes. Steps are in place to ensure all of the issues identified are remedied over the coming months.

4 Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 Do nothing option

The Council could chose to disregard the results of the Council's recent Customer Satisfaction Survey and take no further action. However, in doing so the Council would be failing to act upon valuable customer feedback and would be at risk of reputational harm.

- 4.2 Take action option
By taking action as detailed in section 5 below the Council would be proactively responding to the Customer Survey results. It is therefore deemed appropriate to pursue this option.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Clearly the Council should strive to get all services delivered 'right first time', every time and in doing so ensure customers are kept well informed. To ensure customer satisfaction improves it is recommended the following actions are pursued:
- 5.2 Customer Service Improvement Manager
As part of the Council's Extended Leadership Team restructure due to take place in December 2019 it is proposed a dedicated Customer Service Improvement Manager post is created to ensure the Council puts the customer at heart of everything it delivers. The role would particularly focus on enhancing the service we provide to our customers and communities and setting the standard for excellence in service delivery across the organisation.
- 5.3 Complaint Handling Review
Results from the 2019 Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey clearly show that there is still a significant need for the Council to improve its complaint handling compared to the national top performers – see page 10 in Appendix A attached. It is envisaged that when in post the Customer Service Improvement Manager will conduct a review of the Council's complaint handling and ensure steps are in place to learn from complaints and ensure complaints of a similar nature do not materialise again in future.
- 5.4 Staff Meetings, Performance Monitoring and Training
It is proposed Customer Service continues to play a pivotal role in staff away days and team meetings. Whereby staff take stock of service delivery and come together to discuss and trial potential improvements. Performance monitoring is also key and it is proposed that all staff are continued to be given very clear customer targets, relevant to their role and are monitored to ensure these target are achieved. Where targets are not met it is crucial that resources are in place to support training and development.
- 5.5 I.T. Procurement and Improvement
It is recognised that the Council's work processing software is not as slick as it could be which has resulted in numerous work arounds over the years and an inability to keep track of a customer requests as well as we'd like to. It is proposed that over the course of the next 12 months software is put in place to better manage and prioritise service requests and ensure functionality is in place to clearly keep customers informed and process request efficiently.

5.6 Continued Surveying

The Customer Satisfaction Survey results have undoubtedly highlighted the need for continued customer service improvement. It is therefore proposed surveys continue in order to gain a clear insight on where improvement is needed. In addition to this it is recognised the importance customer focus group play in testing new ways of delivery before improvements are made. As such it is proposed a concerted effort is made to involve customers in the IT improvement programme detailed above. It is recommended the Council re-runs Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey within the next 12 to 18 months and seeks to achieve a **5.7 uplift** in its overall score to bring it in line with Housing Associations, see page 6 of Appendix A attached.

5.7 Progress Reporting

It is felt that in order to improve Customer Service it very much needs to remain high on the Council's agenda. It is therefore proposed progress reports are regularly presented to Members of the Council via relevant Committees, as well as to staff via the Council's in-house, weekly e-newsletter the Friday Flash.

6. **Implications**

| Implications | Relevant to proposals Y/N | Details and proposed measures to address |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Legal/Governance | Y | The Executive has a responsibility to provide Leadership to the overall activities of the Council and has responsibilities regarding Council performance and customer satisfaction. |
| Financial | Y | There are no financial implication as a result of this report that have not already been budgeted for. |
| Risk | Y | A failure to review and act upon customer satisfaction levels could lead to: Lack of coherent delivery Reputational harm Ineffective use of resources Poor quality service These risks are mitigated by: The recommendations outlined in this report |
| Supporting Corporate Strategy | Y | Council Theme – Efficient and Effective |
| Climate change – Carbon / Biodiversity Impact | | Striving to improve customer satisfaction and delivering services right first time ensures valuable resources are not wasted in re-doing work. |
| Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications | | |
| Equality and Diversity | | None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report. |

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|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Safeguarding | | None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report. |
| Community Safety, Crime and Disorder | | None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report. |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | | None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report. |
| Other implications | | N/A |

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Customer Survey Results