



Subject:	Customer Focus Programme Update
Date:	18 September 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Finance & Resources
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	Members are reminded that in May 2020 the Committee was provided with an update on the Customer Focus Programme which included an overview of work being undertaken to support the Covid 19 Recovery programme. Members were also advised that, due to programme resources being redirected, a review of the programme plan was required and would be reported to a future committee.
1.2	This report provides an update on further activity in support of Recovery and provides an update on the programme plan and the channel shift strategy which is a key tenet of the Customer Focus programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: 1. Note the update on support provided to the Recovery Programme. 2. Note the Chanel Shift Strategy summarised.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Note the update on the programme plan and the overview attached at Appendix 2. 4. Note the planned work on services for Elected Members which have been progressed to outline design stage as part of the future blueprint attached at Appendix 3. 5. Note update on the Council’s new website and telephony upgrade. 6. Note that staff and Trade Unions have been engaged and will continue to be consulted as we move to implementation.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Update on support for the Recovery Programme</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that, during the Covid-19 emergency, the Customer Focus Programme diverted resources to support the Community Response Hub and established a customer contact centre in response to requirements for food distribution and referrals for welfare support. The contact centre also supported the recovery of Birth Registrations and switchboard operations.</p> <p>The Community Response Hub and contact centre have now been stood down and the booking line for Birth Registration and operation of switchboard have reverted to Legal and Civic Services. There have been many lessons learned from the response to Covid 19 which has enabled us to test our customer focus principles and has evidenced the strong commitment and resilience of all staff involved.</p> <p>As part of recovery of Council services, including the Council’s main switchboard service, we are routinely monitoring customer contact and adapting our communication with customers as required to manage our contact channels effectively. Analysis of telephone call volumes confirms that the Council continues to experience high volumes of calls. In order to manage telephony effectively and to ensure our customers have a positive experience, the highest volume of calls (Waste Collections) has been directed away from switchboard. This means the welcome message that customers hear when they contact the Council has been changed to promote the use of our website to encourage customers to use our online services and to direct calls to the appropriate service.</p> <p>Staff from the Customer Focus Programme together with Continuous Improvement, Legal and Civic Services, Digital Services, Marketing and Corporate Communications and departments are continuing to support the Council’s Recovery Programme and how customer channels are being managed.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Delivery of the new future blueprint for Customer</u></p> <p>Since the meeting in May 2020 the programme plan has been reviewed in light of resources required to respond to the Covid 19 emergency and the subsequent Recovery Programme.</p>

The diagram attached at **Appendix 1** sets out the draft future blueprint for the Customer hub which was presented at the May 2020 committee.

Our vision of customer focussed services will ensure that we deliver:

- Optimised customer contact – professionalising resources and providing modern digital and telephony systems with access to real time data on contact performance
- Channel shift – moving where possible to digitally enabled self-serve solutions
- Customer centricity – designing our services around the needs of our customers.

The Customer Hub blueprint remains as is, putting our customers at the heart of everything, ensuring we provide a consistent and professional service, affording our customers choice and convenience. This means improving and aligning all our access to service channels – telephone, face to face, website, and social media. To support this we have developed a Channel Shift Strategy.

3.3

Channel Shift Strategy

We have worked with our Strategic Delivery Partner, PA Consulting Limited, to develop a Channel Shift Strategy.

What do we mean by Channel shift?

By ‘Channel Shift’ we mean supporting customers to use the channels that best meet their individual needs and preferences, while providing best value for the Council. This includes the various methods or systems for communication, access, provision and distribution of services that Council has at its disposal e.g. face-to-face, telephone, online, webchat, email, text, letter. These interactions will be with a wide variety of stakeholders and are designed around deep insights into what way various segments of the Council’s overall service user community wish to be engaged, what best suits their lifestyles and abilities. These needs and preferences will likely vary across different types of services.

The focus of the channel strategy is on delivering the best outcomes (financial and non-financial) from using our available resources effectively e.g. more expensive channels such as telephone and face-to-face are directed to those with greatest need / where they will have greatest impact.

What will Channel Shift Deliver?

Belfast City Council wants to meet customer expectations, to deliver a better customer experience whilst reducing costs and so are harnessing digital as the channel of choice for delivery of services and information. It is important to note the strategy is ‘Digital First not Digital Only’ which meets the needs of the majority, enabling provision of sensitive services via more costly channels for those who need it most.

The internet has made customers much more digitally aware and has led to a major shift in how products and services we all consume are both designed and delivered. Customers expect information to be personalised and readily available at the touch of a button. We can see in recent months how digital channels have become even more important during the Covid 19 emergency in enabling different ways of working and supporting local communities.

This Digital First principle reinforces the Council's ambitions to deliver services digitally as far as possible. However, Digital First does not mean that all services to all customers will be delivered through digital channels. Face to face services will be required and for some customers this may continue to be their preferred channel.

Digital First is not just about a new website or new technology. It is about leveraging digital solutions for each service, end to end, to:

- Reduce call volumes
- Eliminate Service failure
- Improve the customer experience
- Enable real time reporting for operatives
- Improve access to real time data.

This has the potential to fundamentally shift the relationship between services and users, as well as how staff work. As such the implementation of 'Digital first' (end to end) and the creation of the Customer Hub is as much a cultural change as it is a change of delivery model. When re-designing each service it is important to implement the channel(s) that are most effective for the service being provided.

3.4

Channel Shift Focuses on Good Service Design

Developing effective channel shift therefore is not about a one size fits all strategy for the entire council. It is not about:

- launching all of our services on all new channels without much thought to the relevance and cost of doing so
- focusing on switching customer contact to the cheapest channel (often assumed to be the internet) without much thought as to the relevance of this channel to the service or customer base.

A more sophisticated approach is required to realise channel shift; to ensure that the most effective channels are leveraged for each service, and for each customer. This approach will be delivered through the application of the design principles (in particular Digital First, Customer Focus) and good Service Design.

The Service Design approach already adopted by Council will be applied to each service as it is on-boarded into the Customer Hub and will ensure that for each service we **understand who the Customers are** for that service. A Customer persona is created for each customer type; detailing the needs, behaviours, pain points and preferred contact points for that customer type. By understanding:

- **Who** BCC customers are
- **What** their needs and capabilities are, and
- **How** they prefer to contact the council,

The Council will be able to develop a Channel Shift campaign consisting of interventions/activities that are ***tailored*** to those customer types to ensure a successful change to adherence of the Digital First principle.

3.5 **Revised Implementation Plan and how we will do this**

Given the complexity of the customer programme it will not be possible to implement all of its elements at one time. Attached at **Appendix 2** is a high level plan setting out the key milestones for the implementation of the Customer Hub in April 2021. Staff and customers have been involved in the programme to date and this will continue throughout the implementation.

By April 2021 we will have the following in place:

3.6 **Customer Hub**

This new function will deal with customer contact for all departments and services, across all channels (online, mobile, telephone, face-to-face, email, and social media).

Initially the hub will manage all customer contact for cleansing/waste and calls currently through the main switchboard and corporate complaints numbers. There is further work planned to co-design processes including the handoff from customer hub to services in other departments. The implementation initially will be on a 'wide and thin' basis i.e. a basic level of information and signposting for customers will be provided at the first point of contact for all services across all channels.

This will provide a platform for on-boarding of services in the next phase after April 2021, deepening the information and value at first point of contact as services are designed end to end - thus improving customer experience.

The structure/establishment of the Customer Hub and detailed design of posts is currently in progress. It is envisaged that staff will be in post by January 2021 to allow for staff development and the building of capacity and support systems and processes for hub operation.

Integral to this formative stage is the inclusion of staff and Trade Unions in understanding the impact of these changes on current posts and post holders and the transition to the new Customer Hub. A separate report on the establishment of the Customer Hub, people, posts and finance will be presented at a future committee.

Discussions on the physical location of the customer hub remain at an early stage and work to examine the feasibility of options has not progressed due to the pandemic and will be reviewed in light of the Recovery Programme and the planning of access to buildings.

3.7 **Elected Members' future blueprint**

A Task and Finish Working Group has been established with elected members who have participated in 3 workshops to date to identify and design solutions to support elected members in their constituency work.

We plan to have a dedicated contact channel for elected members within the Customer Hub. Additionally we will provide members with real time information on service delivery so they can be informed of issues earlier, enabling them to be responsive to constituents' queries. Members will also have the ability to track issues they have raised and will have visibility of issues emerging in their areas. A future blueprint for services for elected members can be found at **Appendix 3**.

Work will continue with members in the coming months to design services to meet their needs which may include prototyping and trialling of solutions.

3.8 **Missed Bins**

Aligned to the overall Resources and Fleet transition and improvement programme, we are seeking to address the issue of missed bin collections. We have focussed specific resource on how we can address these issues including information flows between elected members, customers, staff and managers. For example a prototype of an app to report missed bins has been developed and plans for implementation are in progress. This will help provide better business intelligence and improved understanding of the cause of service failures and identifying interventions to improve service.

3.9 **Enabling Infrastructure**

The success of the Customer Focus programme is wholly dependent on the delivery of enabling infrastructure – web and social media channels provided by Corporate Communications and the technical infrastructure, telephony and systems delivered by Digital Services. The following is an update on these key elements of the programme:

3.10

New Council Website Launched

The Council's new website launched on Tuesday 28 July 2020 in line with the programme plan. There are a number of new design features on the website which are being assessed using web analytics. An overview of performance over the same period from 2019 is as follows:

- Page views have increased by almost 44%. These page views include views of our online forms. We also need to consider an increase in people searching for info during COVID-19.
- Users are viewing more than one page on our website during their visit and are not 'exiting' out of pages early in their journey. Visitors are finding content relevant - both bounce rates and % exits have dropped.
- Users are finding information quicker than they previously would have - average time on page has dropped. We have a cookie statement in place where users are required to opt in to analytics. Our supplier had made us aware that we could see a decline to visitor numbers due to this.

Work is continuing through Marketing and Corporate Communications in partnership with departments to enhance our web content. As we work through, this will iterate and will be ongoing.

3.11

Telephony Infrastructure Upgraded

As evidenced through lockdown and now into recovery our telephone solution is one of the Council's most mission-critical systems. Digital Services has just completed the upgrade of our telephony solution which simplifies administration, and enhances security and business continuity. The system upgrade also introduces enhanced features and services which will be required to support modern digital workplace requirements and the integrated telephony features needed for the Customer Focus Programme. These include:

- Contact Centre
 - Voice, Chat, SMS, Email, FAX, and AI Chatbots
 - Built-in Call and Screen Recording
 - Built-in Workforce Scheduling
- Customised CRM integration
 - Automatically access customer information
 - Pre-populate CRM with customer information
 - Click to dial – call, text or email customers within CRM
- Softphones
 - make and receive calls on your laptop, mobile phone or desk phone
 - voicemail integrated with email

	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.12	<p>SP&R agreed in November 2017 that a budget of £500k be set aside for the customer focus project.</p> <p>Staff and Trade Unions have been engaged throughout the programme. As we move to Delivery, with Trade Union agreement we have established a sub group of JNCC to facilitate further engagement and consultation on staff implications of the programme in line with agreed HR policies and procedures.</p>
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.13	Work on the EQIA for the Customer Focus Programme has been completed and the outcome published on our community engagement platform, Citizenspace.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 - Customer Focus Draft Future Blueprint</p> <p>Appendix 2 - High level plan showing Key Milestones for implementation</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Draft Blueprint of future services for Elected Members</p>