Appendix 1   Lessons learned and recommendations from Phase One and Two

1   Introduction

1.1   The Customer Project Board and Customer Services Team (CST) have continued their work in Phase Two of the Customer Experience (CX) Improvement Plan in 2018/19. This appendix provides an evaluation of the key strands of the project, discusses what we've learned, and makes recommendations arising from both Phase One and Two. Appendix Two provides the results of the different types of feedback collected from digital channels, telephone calls, and face to face visitors.

2   Evaluation of key developments in 2018/19 and recommendations for 2019/20

2.1   Introduction

2.1.1   The pilots for gathering customer feedback have proven valuable in assessing how satisfied our customers are and where improvements can be made. Some areas of customer service have already been improved on the basis of the feedback received and these examples are detailed in Appendix Two. There is potential for making more improvements for our customers and it is recommended that ESCC continues this valuable CX work in 2019/20 and further. Having customer satisfaction measurement systems in place helps monitor customer satisfaction in a structured way, which could also be helpful in measuring customer satisfaction as we move to implement the Customer and Support Service Core Offer, whereby we will expect people to use online resources wherever possible and accept automated rather than personalised responses to general enquiries. Whilst it is clear that the Core Offer will not enable us to deliver overall levels of customer experience we have previously provided, it is nevertheless important that our services meet this new, basic customer need.

2.1.2   At the end of Phase Two of the project, we're confident that we now have a good baseline of customer satisfaction across a range of services, which ESCC didn't have prior to starting these pilots. They have enabled us to understand how customers view ESCC and how we can continue making improvements in our interactions with them.

2.1.3   Throughout the project, we have developed an understanding about what is possible in terms of technical solutions. We have established that a flexible approach to customer feedback is the best course of action, rather than embedding continual customer feedback into everything we do. The results have been positive, and it has been encouraging to learn that customer service across ESCC is very good and that our members of staff strive to provide excellent customer service.

2.2   CX project continuation and the Customer Project Board

2.2.1   It is recommended that the CX project ends as a project and the objectives of this work are moved into CST on a permanent basis. CST would continue developing customer satisfaction monitoring and evaluation and CX development work would be a core part of this team's remit.

2.2.2   It is also recommended that the Customer Project Board becomes the CX Board and meets twice a year to discuss developments, with highlight reports provided virtually for the two alternate quarters. Membership is proposed to continue at Assistant Director level unless the role is delegated. These meetings are crucial for identifying, co-ordinating and evaluating cross-department developments in CX improvement across ESCC. The Board would continue to act as the governing Board for approvals of this work and discuss issues raised by the Customer

Service Network, Customer Services Managers group and Corporate Content Strategy group, which all feed into CX development. CST would lead on CX on behalf of the Board for ESCC as a whole, taking the CX project mainstream and as a permanent function within the team.

2.2.3   CST would continue to work dynamically, and lead or participate in specific projects to measure customer satisfaction, particularly when we make changes to services impacting the customers. CST would continue to be involved with the development of the website, helping teams to improve the information that is offered to customers and thus improving the customer experience, and would continue its involvement in further recommendations from the Board to the Council's approach in channel shifting and the wider digital / AI agenda.

2.3   Digital channels: email and webpage

2.3.1   We have continued to use Customer Thermometer for email and webpage feedback in 2017/18, 2018/19 and into 2019/20. This system uses a simple 1-4 rating and comment box. The volume of feedback regarding the website and email correspondence has steadily increased since this feedback started to be collected in August 2017. For comparison, in Q4 of 2017/18 2,689 individual pieces of feedback were provided and in Q4 of 2018/19 this had risen to 3,311, a 23% increase. The number of teams using the surveys has also increased since the start of the pilot. As of March 2019 there are now 15 teams using the survey within their emails compared to 10 teams in March 2018. The number of webpages that include the Customer Thermometer has also increased from 88 in March 2018 to 549 in June 2019.

2.3.2   The satisfaction rate for 2018/19 across emails has stayed consistent at approximately 80% customer satisfaction (when customers choose excellent and good). This has been a relatively unchanging satisfaction rate since the start of the pilot. Customers are generally very happy with the service they receive by email. We do receive a reasonable number of comments on how to improve the service or how to increase customer satisfaction using this method of feedback. When comments are left by customers expressing dissatisfaction with an email, these are often related to the decision made rather than the service that was given.

2.3.3   It is recommended that email feedback is continued but with a more flexible approach. Teams could choose to continue using the survey on their emails continually, or for one-off campaigns, or for set periods of time as a snapshot, depending on their needs. As reporting is time consuming, this would be particularly useful for teams who have a low volume of customer feedback. It could be used as a periodic 'temperature gauge' of customer service, for example, focusing on when changes occur on certain webpages, and when there are high volume times of the year, for example when school admissions are open. This approach would give us the opportunity to monitor large projects, especially those implementing Core Offer changes to services. As we have found that feedback does not vary on emails over long periods of time, a more flexible and periodic approach would work for this type of feedback.

2.3.4   The satisfaction rate over the year 2018/19 for ESCC's webpages is 64%. This is lower than the satisfaction rate for email interactions with customers. Webpages solicited more comments from customers than emails did. A number of services have found the comments left by customers very useful and these have significant changes to their webpages, including Children's Services, Blue Badges and Parking. The improvements and the impact these had on the satisfaction ratings can be seen in Appendix Two. Other services have been able to make minor changes and corrections, such as fixing broken links, correcting out-of-date contact details, and improving poorly written and out-of-date information. Throughout the pilots staff have expressed that the comment function is the most helpful for making changes and understanding why a customer might be dissatisfied.

2.3.5   The website feedback is very valuable, especially in cases where we are trying to channel shift our customers to a self-service model. This will only really work if we can direct customers to a site that has the correct information and is easy to use. The website acts as the 'shop window' for the Council and we need to help services get this information right in order to fulfil our Council priorities and help with the implementation of the Core Offer. Going forward it is recommended

that we undertake some further systematic work to better understand why the website overall receives significantly lower ratings than other channels and how we can seek to improve it.

2.3.6   It is recommended working alongside Adult Social Care and Digital Services who are preparing to pilot a chatbot on the Blue Badge webpages. We would use Customer Thermometer alongside the chatbot to monitor customer satisfaction rates during the pilot. Blue Badge webpages have proved one of our lowest customer satisfaction areas and a chatbot is being investigated as an alternative option if the customer is unable to find the information they require. This would also support channel shifting within this department.

2.3.7   The system used to pilot the digital feedback is easy and flexible to use. It provides us with useful and real time information that is presented on an online dashboard, and although reporting can be time consuming, we have put measures in place to make it easier and quicker to report.

2.3.8   It is recommended that we continue with the digital feedback using the same software, Customer Thermometer, and continue with the same teams, but advertise Customer Thermometer to more teams and encourage them to use the survey on an ad hoc basis, where appropriate. Customer Thermometer is inexpensive and works well for what we are using it for.

2.4   Telephone feedback

2.4.1   As part of Phase Two of the CX project, a telephone survey was piloted. This type of survey has been the most challenging. Firstly, it has proved very difficult to deliver from a technical point of view due to the varying telephony systems ESCC uses, and there is no universal fix that can accommodate these different systems.

2.4.2   Secondly, the level of engagement from staff with the telephone survey pilot was low. Staff were provided with a script to ask the customer whether they would like to participate in a customer satisfaction survey, to be asked at the end of the phone call. This meant that the survey was self-selecting as opposed to all the other feedback methods used (face to face iPad, email and webpage) where any customers can choose to give feedback. Team Managers and some staff members fed back that they felt very uncomfortable asking every customer to complete the survey, particularly customers who were clearly dissatisfied with the service. There were some concerns that staff 'cherry-picked' customers and this may have resulted in survey responses biased towards the positive. Agile working by a number of staff also meant that transferring a customer to the survey was not possible as staff who work remotely are unable to transfer calls from their mobile.

2.4.3   To try to increase the number of surveys that were completed, the Principal Customer Services Officer, along with Team Managers, attended team meetings to encourage members of staff to take part. Whilst this increased the number of surveys for a few weeks, the number began to drop again soon after.

2.4.4   Telephone feedback has been very positive, with 93% of customers who completed the survey indicating that they were satisfied with the service they had received during their telephone call during the nine month pilot. However, this needs to be considered in the context of the comments above that there may have been bias towards staff inviting obviously 'happy customers' to participate in the surveys, although we have no real way of knowing the extent of this, if indeed it was a real factor. There were a small number of verbatim comments left which were all positive and complimented the staff who took the call.

2.4.5   Some teams that take a larger number of phone calls, namely Highways and Parking, gained more value from the telephone surveys than the smaller teams. The number of surveys asked was higher and thus the amount of data to draw conclusions was much larger. These teams are also part of services that are contracted out and the managers found the data useful to monitor the performance of the contract.

2.4.6   Due to the poor engagement levels of staff in the pilot, the project team revisited and investigated a number of options that were previously looked at in the research stage of this pilot. This was to see whether there were any further developments in technological options that could be used to make telephone surveys more successful for both staff and customers. However, there were no easy solutions. The following are two options that come close to meeting our needs:

- There is one option where customers are given an automated introduction at the beginning of a telephone call to opt-in to a survey at the end of their call. This removes the onus from the member of staff having to answer the question at the end of the call. This option comes with a cost of £22k per annum and it would not work on all of the telephony systems we use. Because of the high cost of implementing and limited applicability, we decided not to pursue this as an option.

- We investigated a further option of using a text service after the telephone call. This means that at a later time the customer receives a survey via text. This is also expensive, and it includes using mobile telephone numbers for other purposes than the core service the customer is receiving, which is difficult without engaging explicit consent from the customer. The biggest concern with this option is that it results in being very similar to the method we piloted, where the onus falls back onto staff to ask the customer to take part in a telephone survey at the end of a call due to needing to gain explicit consent. For this reason and the cost, we decided not to pursue this option.

2.4.7   For the reasons described above, it is recommended to discontinue telephone surveys on an ESCC-wide approach. However, East Sussex Highways (ESH) has expressed an interest in continuing the telephone survey with their contact centre, at their own expense. ESH have some of our highest call volumes across ESCC, taking 45,374 external calls for the year 2018/19. This would involve a new contract between ESH and cMetrix, our current telephone survey provider. ESH will provide the Customer Services Team monthly feedback statistics for their telephone survey results. This will enable the team to continue monitoring some customer satisfaction on the telephone.

2.5   Face to face feedback

2.5.1   Phase Two of the project, also included piloting a face to face survey using iPads. These were placed in the entrances of five ESCC buildings: County Hall, Ocean House, St. Mary's House, Eastbourne Library and Hastings Library. The customer satisfaction for this method of feedback averaged indicated 76% of customers who completed this survey were satisfied with the customer service they had received during their visit to the council site they had visited that day. Feedback results by location are presented in Appendix Two.

2.5.2   This feedback method has been very successful in the public libraries, and customers are feeding back that they like the fact that we provide the devices as it shows accountability for the service we're providing. They have not been used as much in the three reception areas. This could be due to the fact that customers do not necessarily see themselves as customers when they are accessing these Council buildings. In addition to this, it was not always practical or technically possible to locate the devices in the ideal places (i.e. close to the point where they exit the building) so many customers may not have seen or walked past them.

2.5.3   The survey software used did not have the function to allow the customer to leave a comment explaining why they were leaving the feedback they did. The teams involved in the pilot thought that it was difficult to draw conclusions from the data that was gathered. In reception areas, it was difficult to know what the customer was leaving feedback on, as the customer may be leaving feedback for a number of different services.

2.5.4   It is recommended to continue to use these devices as they are easy to use and we can gain success rates for particular locations. We also own the iPads so we are able to use them more flexibly. It is recommended that they are rotated around other locations, for example, The Keep, other libraries, and used at events. Teams have expressed interest in using the iPads to undertake their own customer survey at events and so this would be a useful service to offer.

2.5.5   It is recommended that we change the software on the iPads to Customer Thermometer. This would be much more flexible and allows us to compare the face to face, email and website feedback within the same system. It also means that customers will be able to leave a comment which can be acted upon and help to build a bigger picture of how customers view the Council. The survey would drop down to one question, as per the email and webpage survey, followed by a comment box. The use of one question and a comment field may increase response rates and encourage customers leave comments.

2.5.6   Since the responses have been lower within reception areas, it is recommended that a six month pilot within reception areas is undertaken to see if a change in software, and a new approach of questioning, solicits a larger number of responses.

2.6   Customer Services Network

2.6.1   It is recommended to continue the Customer Services Network (CSN) which began in June 2018. It has proved very popular with staff and has been successful in tackling with some difficult issues and frustrations amongst teams and services. It's an excellent platform for staff across the Council to help one another discuss the issues facing their services and share best practice and suggest solutions. The group could be a valuable group to provide insight and evidence for the CX Board when considering changes due to the Core Offer, and how these changes affect the customer experience.

2.7   Customer Contact Baseline

2.7.1   It would be beneficial to work towards establishing a reliable, comprehensive and ongoing baseline of the customer contact ESCC receives, which we do not currently have. This includes telephone calls, emails, and online forms. Understanding where our high volume contact points are will be important in order to further evaluate and improve CX, and this data would enable us to identify high volume areas of contact where there is the potential to channel shift online. Initial work to gather this data has been undertaken and is presented as Appendix Three. We have encountered limitations in gathering this data systematically, regularly and comprehensively, due to the numerous systems used to deliver our communication channels. However, processes can be put in place to collect this in the future if it is seen as valuable. There is no significant cost to this; by and large it is a question of staff resources and prioritisation of this work. So far, we have been able to gather data for incoming telephone calls received, and this is also included in Appendix Three.

3.0   Costs for implementing the recommendations

3.1   For all feedback surveys, Customer Thermometer (CT) would be used. CT works on a 'credits' basis. Each month, additional credits are added to the account which allows us to receive survey responses. One survey equals one credit used. When we started the pilot we paid for a large number of credits which have yet to be used. For the next six months, the cost would remain at $9 (~ £7.10) per month. After this, the cost to continue using Customer Thermometer would be $209 per month (~ £165), and this provides us with 3,000 credits every month. The 3,000 credits are based on our webpage and email monthly average survey responses, plus the average number of face to face iPad survey responses we have received. The estimated cost for 2019/20 for CT credits would be approx. £500.

3.2   In order to switch the iPad face to face survey over to CT, there is an initial set up cost of $299 (~ £235) per tablet. We have five tablets and so to set up a new survey on all five would be a total cost of $1495 (~ £1,174).

3.3.   The total cost for 2019/20 for the survey software would be approx. £1,700. For 2020/21 and onwards, the survey software would cost approx. £2,000 per annum. This cost would be absorbed within CET's Customer Services Team's budget.

4.0   Conclusion

4.1   The Customer Experience Improvement Plan in the CX project has provided us with feedback from customers that we previously did not gather. It also allowed us to pilot different methods of feedback to see what works and what doesn't. We now have a large amount of data that can help us to understand how customers view their interaction with the Council and also help us to form decisions to make the experience better for our customers. Being able to continue the work with these recommendations would allow us to carry on with our improvements to customer experience across all methods of customer contact. Baselining our customer contact means that we can use this alongside our feedback collected and help us to understand the most cost effective way of having contact with our customers. We can use this data to channel shift our customers and continue to monitor customer satisfaction across our customer contact channels.