

Policy and Resources Committee	
Meeting Date	5 th November 2025
Report Title	Customer Experience Strategy
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing & Community Services
Lead Officer	Andre Bowen, Service Improvement & Project Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce a new Customer Experience Strategy in place of the former Customer Access Strategy to match service delivery with trends in customer demands and resources. 2. To note the proposed action plan. 3. Delegate authority to the Director of Resources and Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, to take relevant actions to facilitate the required transformation activities.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 In June 2013, Swale Borough Council approved the then new Customer Access Strategy. The overall aim of this strategy was “ensuring easy, clear and convenient access to Swale’s services for all”.
- 1.2 As part of the Housing and Communities Service Action Plan 2023-2024, it was agreed to review the Customer Access Strategy. This was agreed in order to ensure team structures are in place to support a stronger Customer Service Centre digital resilience and exploit opportunities where they exist.
- 1.3 Due to the budget pressures being experienced for not only the 2025/26 financial year but also the years following, the Council has had to fundamentally review what services it provides and how they are provided to try and identify savings to help achieve a balanced sustainable budget in future years.
- 1.4 This report and the accompanying appendices set out the details of the full review and the formulation of the new strategy.

2 Background

- 2.1 Swale Borough Council currently has 3 customer offices that operate at various times at Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheppey. There is also a main telephone switchboard that operates normal working hours. Customers also have self-service options and can contact the Council through post or email (for some services).
- 2.2 Throughout the review of the Customer Experience Strategy, all available data were reviewed, including how many customers contacted us using each channel and how much it cost per contact. Local authority provision nationally and locally were also compared.
- 2.3 To ensure that all customer experiences were captured, feedback was sought from staff, shared building partners, elected members and the general public.
- 2.4 The contact received over the last two years from customers and national trends indicate that our customers' expectations are evolving rapidly. Customers are increasingly demanding faster, more personalised interactions and seamless experiences across digital channels. Customers are able to achieve faster, more personalised interactions received from many public body services. In response, the proposed strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to enhancing customer experience by leveraging digital innovation, streamlining service delivery, and aligning operations with emerging trends using real-time data.
- 2.5 A key component of this strategy involves addressing the needs of customers where support is needed while also improving the physical office experience. To achieve this, the new Customer Experience Strategy consolidates our physical footprint, while making existing offices more welcoming for our customers. Importantly, the strategy includes robust support measures for affected customers, such as enhanced digital access, targeted outreach, and alternative service options to ensure continuity and inclusivity. This decision is informed by usage data, customer feedback, and operational efficiency metrics, ensuring that resources are directed where they can deliver the greatest impact. By modernising our service model, we aim to create a more agile, responsive, and future-ready organisation that continues to meet—and exceed—customer expectations.
- 2.6 By consolidating services and investing in digital channels and targeted outreach, we can better meet rising expectations, deliver more efficient services, and achieve necessary cost savings. This approach ensures that resources are focused where they have the greatest impact, while maintaining support for those who may be digitally excluded or require face-to-face assistance.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Introduce a new Customer Experience Strategy in place of the former Customer Access Strategy to match service delivery with trends in customer demands and resources.
- 3.2 To note the proposed action plan.
- 3.3 Delegate authority to the Director of Resources and Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, to take relevant actions to facilitate the required transformation activities.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 The least favourable option of doing nothing and to continuing with the current strategy despite a reduction in resources in real terms was rejected due to financial constraints. Additionally, the trend in customer demands and how they interact with the Council cannot be met from the former strategy with the resources available.
- 4.2 Another option considered to provide a greater visible presence across our offices was to increase the opening hours. This would also allow residents to have more options to visit Council offices to get information and assistance in a friendly and professional environment. Residents also build a positive relationship with the Council through our face-to-face representatives. This option was also rejected as this would create even further financial strain. Further, the trends do not coincide with longer office opening hours.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Elected members took part in an early engagement workshop to understand the challenges and opportunities that exist. Member input was used to shape the new proposed Customer Experience Strategy.
- 5.2 Officers from across the Council which included representatives from every department contributed towards the development of the proposed new strategy.
- 5.3 Shared buildings partners have also been consulted on their views, as shown in Appendix III. The Sheppey Gateway Steering Group were also further consulted for further information about the customer experience specifically at the Gateway.
- 5.4 There were also several presentations at Area Committees across where attendees were asked for their opinions on how the customer experience could be improved.

- 5.5 Members of the public were consulted regarding how the Council interacts with customers, as seen in Appendix IV. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed to show how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in decision-making, as seen in Appendix V.
- 5.6 All voluntary groups were contacted directly via the Swale CVS network to ensure that feedback was gathered from individuals across all protected characteristics—including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation—as well as other socially excluded groups, helping to ensure representation reflective of Swale’s population.
- 5.7 The Customer Experience Strategy was developed in line with Swale Borough Council’s Policy Statement for carrying out public consultations and the Gunning principles.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>The agreed way forward will support several Corporate Plan objectives. These include ‘Running the Council’ by working within our resources, and delivering in a transparent and efficient way.</p> <p>There is also a link to the ‘Community’ objective through the work that will be undertaken with other public sector organisations and community groups to provide digital assistance to support people who find it difficult using online services.</p>
Financial, Resource and Property	Delivery of the work associated to the Customer Experience Strategy will be committed to from the existing delivery resources of the Community Service Team and Transformation budget. No, additional funding for projects outside of this area of work has been agreed.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	<p>The Customer Experience Strategy sets out to improve reporting systems for issues like littering, flytipping, dog fouling, graffiti, abandoned vehicles or noise nuisance. Where our customers have confidence that our systems and processes work effectively, they are more likely to report problems which can then be addressed.</p> <p>Similarly, the Customer Experience Strategy embeds customer feedback and customer insights into the core of the strategy. Providing additional opportunities for customers to engage more, including on issues such as crime and disorder. This in turn affects decision-making, improve processes and make them more suitable for our customers.</p>

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	<p>The Customer Experience Strategy links with the Digital Strategy (in development), to ensure that we are able to provide accessible information in digital form to our customers. This includes information on the Environment and Climate.</p> <p>Likewise, the Customer Experience Strategy sets out to improve reporting systems for issues like littering, flytipping or problems at our parks, open spaces or seafronts.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>The Customer Experience Strategy is cross departmental, encompassing every department. A joint commitment to improving the customer experience, includes areas such as pest infestations in communities, unsafe housing, and pollution.</p>
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	<p>Within Swale there are particular challenges such as cost living and digital exclusion that may affect vulnerable adults more when trying to access services. As such the Customer Experience Strategy outlines support for those customers. We ensure that all partners we work with comply with safeguarding policies and we are delivering according to our own policies.</p>
Risk Management and Health and Safety	<p>There are no financial and legal risks associated with the delivery of the Customer Experience Strategy's aims. However, expert advice has been sought from the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal to confirm.</p> <p>There is a risk of reputational damage due to the changes resulting from the Customer Experience Strategy. Customers will be consulted on the proposed changes, efforts will be made to explain all decisions clearly.</p>
Equality and Diversity	<p>We recognise that public service provision should be inclusive and accessible. Therefore, where there are changes resulting from the Customer Experience Strategy that may impact particular groups more than others as identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment.</p>
Privacy and Data Protection	<p>To improve the customer experience, a cooperative approach is being taken to reduced excessive compartmentalisation. Nevertheless, there is a legal requirement to ensure customers' privacy and personal data abides to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). As such, all improvements to the customer experience includes GDPR considerations.</p>

7 Appendices

Appendix I: Customer Experience Strategy

Appendix II: High Level Action Plan

Appendix III: Shared Buildings Partners Responses

8 Background Papers

None.