

Report for LGR Implementation Board, 31 January 2023 – Customer Strategy and Service Standards

Executive Member(s): Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity and Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Lead Member for Communities

Local Member(s) and Division: N/A

Lead Officer: Alyn Jones – LGR Programme Director

Authors:

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1. Summary / Background

- 1.1.** This report introduces four customer focussed products which have been developed in preparation for vesting day of the new Council.

Following consideration by the LGR Implementation Board, the Executive is being asked to approve these products.

- 1.2.** The Customer Strategy (see Appendix A) outlines the Council's strategic vision for customer access. Complimenting the Strategy are the corporate Customer Promise and Customer Standards (Appendices B and C) which have been developed to ensure customers are clear about what they should expect from the Council when they contact us through a variety of contact channels. The development and publication of these interim

standards demonstrate best practice and a clear commitment to our customers, as other newly formed Unitary authorities have not had standards in place for day one. Within the Customer Strategy there is a commitment to review these standards within the first year, with our customers.

1.3

In addition to Customer Standards (Appendix C), Service Standards have been developed, for specific operational services delivered to customers by the existing councils in Somerset, and are set out in Appendix D. Many of these standards will remain unchanged at vesting day for each council area, but in some areas some alignment has been possible to provide a Somerset-wide approach when the new Somerset Council comes into being. Links are provided in Appendix D to details for each service area. This report sets out how the standards have been developed by the various services and used to help consider options for the new Somerset council budget.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that the Executive:

- (i) Approve the draft Customer Strategy, Customer Promise and Customer Standards.
- (ii) Approve the baseline Service Standards in Appendix D.
- (iii) Delegate authority to make any consequential amendments to these service standards following approval of the 2023/24 Budget for Somerset Council, to the Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Director of Commissioning.
- (iv) Delegate authority to publish and communicate (ii) and (iii) as Interim Service Standards for vesting day, to the Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Director of Commissioning.

3. Reasons for recommendations

3.1 Approaches to customer access have been managed independently across the five councils. We recognise that demand for our services is increasing along with the expectations of greater access, ease of use and quality of customer service. So, there is now a need to ensure that, from the outset, the new council sets a vision and plan to meet these demands and expectations.

3.2 Knowledge and understanding of operational service standards will help inform

decisions on the Medium-Term Financial Plan and inform the public of the standard of service they can expect from vesting day.

4. Other options considered

- 4.1. No further options have been considered. Each of the products have been prioritised as a 'must have' for vesting day, to help customers, communities and staff understand the Councils vision and day one operational standards.

Within each service area alternatives for alignment or differentiation of service have been considered and are summarised in the service standard templates (Appendix D).

5. Links to County Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

- 5.1. The Customer Strategy provides the vision and strategic direction for the design and delivery of customer service within the Council. Whilst the Strategy does not include detailed costings it will need to be funded within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.
- 5.2. Service Standards have helped with evaluation of savings options for the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

6. Consultations and co-production

- 6.1. Internal consultation on developing the draft Customer Strategy, Customer Promise and Customer Standards has been undertaken with:
- **Customer, Digital and Website Workstreams** – various engagement throughout product development.
 - **Service Alignment Workstream** - various engagement throughout product development.
 - **Customer, Communities and Partnerships Board** – approach endorsed 16/11/2022

Service Standards have been developed and co-produced by sub-workstreams comprising staff members from all councils, contractors, and other organisations. In addition, all customer documents above, including service standards, have been considered by the Fortnightly LGR workshops and LGR Programme Board.

- 6.2. Five focus group sessions have been held with a total of 42 members of

Somerset Councils Customer Panel to test and obtain feedback about the customer principles, with amendments incorporated into the documents.

7. Financial and Risk Implications

- 7.1.** There are no direct financial implications from these recommendations. Without the Service Standards however there is a risk of Medium-Term Financial Planning decisions being made in absence of understanding of impact on service delivery, and risk of lack of clarity on levels of service in different areas from day one.
- 7.2.** There are no specific risks arising from these recommendations however failure to deliver against these products could cause reputational harm. This will be managed through consistent performance reporting and corrective management actions as set out in the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Likelihood	3	Impact	3	Risk Score	9
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8. Legal and HR Implications

- 8.1.** There are no direct legal or HR implications to the recommendations being accepted.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1.** There are no implications arising directly from this report relating to:

- Community Safety
- Sustainability
- Health and Safety
- Health and Wellbeing
- Social Value

As part of future service alignment, if service standards change, the full range of other implications will need to be considered on a service-by-service basis.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and appended to this report, this details actions needed to ensure that protected groups are not negatively impacted by the endorsement and implementation of the products presented in this report.

10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

10.1. The Customer Strategy and Service Standards were presented to the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee on the 19th January 2023.

The following comments have been noted prior to the minutes being published.

- LGR Joint Scrutiny were interested in feedback loops: the quality and information to customers and links to digital approaches.
- The Customer Standards commits to a 1-day e-mail acknowledgement but 10 days for a full written response. This suggests a differential in service provision.
- Concern was expressed around the ability to read all messages received via social media and the benefits of doing so.
- Joint Scrutiny asked about the definition and the usefulness of the term 'Customer'.
- Be mindful of the language used and review the documents presented.
- Service standards templates should be amended to integrate links to service web pages and other useful information about that service.

11. Background

11.1. The background to the Customer Strategy, Promise and Standards is set out in Appendix E.

11.2. The background to Service Standards is set out in Appendix D.

12. Background Papers

12.1. • Appendix A – Draft Customer Strategy

- Appendix B – Draft Customer Promise
- Appendix C – Draft Customer Standards
- Appendix D – Baseline Service Standards
- Appendix E – Background – Customer Strategy

Report Sign-Off

		Date completed
Legal Implications	Honor Clarke	Click or tap to enter a date.
Governance	Scott Wooldridge	Click or tap to enter a date.
Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	Click or tap to enter a date.
Customers, Digital and Workforce	Chris Squire	Click or tap to enter a date.
Property	Paula Hewitt / Oliver Woodhams	Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Claire Griffiths	Click or tap to enter a date.
Senior Manager	[Click here and type SLT officer name]	Click or tap to enter a date.
Commissioning Development	Sunita Mills / Ryszard Rusinek	Click or tap to enter a date.
Executive Member	Click here to select the relevant Executive Member	Click or tap to enter a date.
<u>Sign-off Key Decision / Consulted on Non-Key Decision</u>		
Local Member	Click here to identify the local member(s)	Click or tap to enter a date.
Opposition Spokesperson (Key decisions consult / non key decisions inform)	Click here to select the relevant Opposition Spokesperson	Click or tap to enter a date.
Scrutiny Chair (Key decisions consult / non key decisions inform)	Click here to select the relevant Scrutiny Chair	Click or tap to enter a date.

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Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA, please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer

Version

2.0

Date

22nd December 2022

Description of what is being impact assessed

Customer Strategy – the vision and approach to customer service for the new Somerset Council.

Customer Charter and Standards – set out our approach to customer service and what our customers can expect.

Customer Excellence Model – reflect the principles in our charter and strategy.

Service Standards - developed for operational services delivered to customers by the existing councils in Somerset.

Implementation of a new Customer Strategy and Charter for the new Somerset Council, underpinned by an ambition to achieve the Customer Service Excellence standard. The development of the strategy has been informed by an analysis of existing Strategy’s across each authority and a series of workshops with Customer Service managers, customers (through the Customer Panel) and engagement with the wider Customers, Communities and Partnerships workstream and service alignment.

Service Standards have been developed by sub-workstream leads who have worked with their staff members from all councils, contractors, and other organisations.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the

[Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#), should be detailed here

A broad analysis of data from the Somerset Intelligence Partnership has informed our approach and understanding to ensure that the products consider impacts on protected groups. The 2021 Census data is yet to be released in its entirety, therefore the data obtained is mostly using 2011 data.

A summary of the data identifies:

The population of Somerset has increased by 7.8 % since 2011 – this is higher than the increase experienced within England and Wales of 6.3%.

Misc.	Total population	571,600	100.0%
	Live in rural area	269,868	48.0%

Analysis by Protected Groups

Race and Ethnicity - 94.6% of Somerset's population are 'White British'. This proportion is typical of that seen in Somerset's neighbouring local authorities but much higher than the England and Wales average (80.5%). Somerset's non- 'White British' residents tend to be concentrated in and around the county's principal towns.

Age - There has been more than a 50% increase in the number of people aged 70-74 and there are a third more people aged 90 or over. The rise in the number of people in the mid-20s to mid-30s is also noticeable with a nearly 30% increase in the number of people aged 30-34. Three quarters of the population growth between 2011 and 2021 was in the 65+ age range.

Disability - 5.1% of the Somerset population (26,945 people) have described their health as bad or very bad. This is in line with the Southwest average and slightly below the figure for England and Wales (5.6%).

There are nearly 9,000 households (3.9% of all households in Somerset) containing at least one adult with a long-term disability or health condition

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

- Customer, Website and Digital Workstreams – regular updates and more recently the draft strategy and customer promise and standards has been shared and feedback provided.
- Service Alignment/CCP working group – to ensure that core services within Service Alignment are aware of the Strategy, have an opportunity to feedback and influence the principles.
- Workshops – initially to develop ‘strawman strategy’ with Contact Centre managers.
- Customer Panel – October and December 2022 – follow up sessions with a particular emphasis on the Customer Promises and Customer Standards

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, assess the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older residents may lack technical literacy skills or be less able to make use of digital services. • Young people may feel unable to make their voice heard regarding the shaping of our services. 	☒	☐	☐
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain disabilities may impact the channels through which customers are able to contact us: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulty using online services for those with visual impairments ○ Difficulty understanding aspects of our services for those with learning difficulties ○ Accessibility requirements for those with physical disabilities, particularly in our face-to-face hubs. • If not published in different formats, the Customer Strategy, Promises and Standards maybe less accessible to those with visual impairments or learning difficulties. 	☒	☐	☐

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Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals whose first language is not English may find it challenging to request/report a service with the council as they may not be confident writing in English or may struggle to accurately describe their concerns in a second language. If not published in different formats, the Customer Strategy, Promises and Standards maybe less accessible to those whose first language is not English. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	☐	☐	☐
Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered this Protected Characteristic and do foresee any disproportionate positive or negative impact on this group. 	☐	☐	☐
Other, e.g., carers, veterans, homeless, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People in rural areas experience relatively poor mobile signals or broadband speed 	☒	☐	☐

Negative outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Customers will continue to be provided with the same access routes into Council services. These will be consolidated channels which will offer one front door from April 2023. This includes online, telephony, face to face, email, and social media.	01/04/2023	CCP Customer Experience Workstream	Ongoing analysis of Contact Centre system data alongside measurements of customer satisfaction.	☐
Customer Panel to ensure there is	31/08/2023	CCP	Ongoing basis through tracking of	☐

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representation from younger age groups, as well as engaging with stakeholder groups that provide services and/or function as a voice for younger people, to extend our reach.		Customer Experience Workstream	representation on Panel and will be incorporated into a review of the Panel (tranche 2 product)	
<p>Ensure that the Customer Strategy, Promises and Standards are published in formats that meet the needs of customers that may be visually impaired, experience learning difficulties or where English is not their first language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick reference formats of the documents to be accessible on the Somerset Council website, allowing for ease of access and the ability to access translation tools via the website. • Offer large print or braille versions of the documents. <p>Produce a video which can both visually and audibly share key messages.</p>	30/03/2023	Gareth Denslow	<p>Publication of documents in the formats detailed.</p> <p>Formal milestone to be added to Project plan/s.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Translation services which are in place across each of the authorities, to support non-English speaking customers, will continue to be in place from vesting day.	01/04/2023	CCP Customer Experience Workstream	Ongoing	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Ensure that at all Customer Service Advisors are adequately trained and refreshed regarding equalities.	01/04/2023	CCP Customer Experience Workstream	Vesting Day audit and ongoing Line Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Completed by:	Gareth Denslow
Date	23/11/2022
Signed off by:	
Date	
Equality Lead/Manager sign off date:	
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	



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Review date:



