

## CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2024-27

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### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to present the new corporate Customer Service Strategy 2024-27. The council's Constitution requires the production of a Customer Service Strategy. The last one expired in 2020 and was temporarily replaced with the post-pandemic Recovering Council Customer Service Action Plan, which has been completed.
- 1.2 The Strategy comprises three elements, the core Strategy with a supporting Action Plan and a Customer Service Charter. An Equality and Socio Economic Impact Assessment has also been completed and is attached. These products were approved by SMT on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
- 1.3 We developed this new Customer Service Strategy taking account of:
  - A benchmarking exercise of other local authority strategies
  - A review of other relevant documents including the new Corporate Plan, Connect for Success principles and a range of other local and national strategies
  - The Customer Service Excellence Standard regarding the fundamentals of excellent customer service.
  - A consultation exercise on the draft Strategy that took place from 7th December 2023 to 14th January 2024 which had 244 external customer responses and 32 employee responses. The customer consultation included both online and hard copy surveys posted out to hard-to-reach customers.

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This purpose of this paper is to present the new corporate Customer Service Strategy 2024-27. The council's Constitution requires the production of a Customer Service Strategy. The last one expired in 2020 and was temporarily replaced with the post-pandemic Recovering Council Customer Service Action Plan, which has been completed. The Strategy comprises three elements, the core strategy with a supporting action plan and a customer service charter. These products were approved by SMT on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
- 2.2 **Appendix 1** shows the updated version of the Strategy, Charter and Action Plan taking account of the consultation feedback. That feedback regarding the Strategy was positive with 85% of respondents happy with the principles and priorities in the Strategy and 90% agreeing that the Charter commitments were fair and reasonable. Every question allowed respondents to leave comments and 996 different comments and suggestions were made. Many inputs were on common themes and they were refined into actionable changes. **Appendix 2** shows these actionable changes. **Appendix 3** is the Equality and Socio Economic Impact Assessment (EQSEIA), which shows the positive impact the Strategy will have on equality.

### 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Policy and Resources Committee note the outcomes of the consultations on the draft Customer Service Strategy and the changes made to it using the customer and employee insights gained (**Appendix 2**).
- 3.2 That the Policy and Resources Committee approves the revised Customer Service Strategy, Charter and Action Plan (**Appendix 1**) and associated EQSEIA (**Appendix 3**) to proceed to the next full Council meeting in June 2024.

### 4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The council's Constitution requires the development of a Customer Service Strategy and the last one expired in 2020, to be superseded on a one-off basis by the post-pandemic Recovering Council Customer Service Action Plan. A new Customer Service Strategy is therefore required to cover the period 2024-27. The Customer Engagement Team (following benchmarking and other analysis), developed an initial draft of a new Customer Service Strategy, along with supporting Customer Service Charter and an Action Plan of improvements actions designed to help delivery of the Strategy and Charter.
- 4.2 The draft Strategy was presented to Departmental Management Team in November 2023 and approved for both internal and external consultation. That consultation took place over December 2023 and early January 2024 and elicited 276 responses of which 32 were from employees. We made particular efforts to reach non-digital customers,

posting out 300 surveys with reply paid envelopes.

4.3 The consultation responses were broadly very positive and headline figures from the questions asked are listed below:

| Question   | YES  | NO           |
|--|--|--------------|
| Do you think the six Principles and associated priorities in the Strategy cover the main elements of good customer service?  | 236<br>(85%)   | 40<br>(15%)  |
| Is the Customer Service Strategy for 2024-2027 clear and easy to understand?   | 223<br>(82%)   | 50<br>(18%)  |
| Do you believe the six commitments in the Customer Service Charter are fair and reasonable?  | 246<br>(90%)   | 27<br>(10%)  |
| Each of the Strategy Priorities has a distinct set of actions in the Strategy Action Plan. Do you think the listed actions will help the council tackle its priorities and improve customer service delivery in the future?                            | 195<br>(76%)   | 62<br>(24%)  |
| Do you think the new Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan will help the council to meet the needs of our less digitally able customers?   | 146<br>(59%)   | 102<br>(41%) |
| Based on your understanding of the proposed Customer Service Strategy, Charter and Plan, how likely do you think it is that the Council will be better placed to deliver high standards of customer care in the future? Score 1-5 with 5 = Very Likely | 62 scored 1 or 2 (23%)<br>93 scored 3 (34%)<br>121 scored 4 or 5 (44%) |              |

4.4 In addition to the quantitative questions asked above, there were a series of questions asking for additional comments or improvements to the Strategy and Charter and for suggested actions for the Action Plan. 996 individual comments were received on the following questions:

- Do you have any suggestions to improve the new Customer Service Strategy for 2024-2027?
- Are the six commitments in the Customer Service Charter comprehensive enough, and if not, is there any pledge or standard that you think should be added?
- Considering any dealings with the council over the past year, please tell us what was good about the experience and if there is anything you would like us to improve.
- Are there other methods or measures that you think should be used to check the quality of the council's customer service (and therefore the success of the new Customer Service Strategy and Plan)?
- Are there any additional actions that you believe should be added to the Action Plan that would help the council to enhance customer service delivery to citizens and businesses?
- Please tell us any additional comments you have on whether our Strategy and Action Plan will help meet the needs of our less digitally able customers.

4.5 The feedback had a number of common themes, such as:

- Too much emphasis on digital activity and the continuing need to help digital strugglers through effective person to person availability
- Concerns around how we will measure good customer service and the success of the strategy
- Taking account of the Islands more in customer service delivery

- Too much jargon and “Council speak” in the Strategy
- The need to reduce bureaucracy and needless barriers to good service
- Ensuring adequate accountability and measurement of Charter pledges
- Referencing the need to deliver service in a green, climate friendly way.

4.6 We have condensed the common themes and actionable comments into a table at **Appendix 2** and this specifies what we changed in the Strategy, Charter and Action Plan because of the actionable comments.

4.7 We made a number of amendments and additions to the Strategy and Charter to better align it to the feedback from customers and employees. Six amended and additional actions were included in Action Plan. The revised version of the Strategy, Charter and Action Plan are shown at **Appendix 1**. The consultation has also been referenced in the Equality and Socio Economic Impact Assessment at **Appendix 3**, which shows a number of positive impacts that will arise from implementation of the new Strategy.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The six principles enshrined in the new corporate Customer Service Strategy align with our strategic priorities and will shape our customer service delivery through to 2027. The Strategy had significant opportunity for comment by customers and employees, who showed strong support for those principles and the Charter and Action Plan that will underpin them. We assimilated detailed feedback from the consultation (**Appendix 2**) into the final product at **Appendix 1** and this provides good assurance that it is fit for purpose. We have also completed an EQSEIA for the Strategy at **Appendix 3**, recording the likely positive impacts of the Strategy on protected characteristics and Fairer Duty Scotland categories.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy – The Customer Service Strategy is mandated in the Council’s Constitution. This customer informed Strategy aligns with the Connect For Success change programme and other relevant strategies.

6.2 Financial – There may be costs associated with some of the Strategy Action Plan deliverables, but these will be subject to separate approvals.

6.3 Legal – Will ensure compliance with customer service related laws e.g. data protection.

6.4 HR – References customer service training for employees

6.5 Fairer Duty Scotland – See elements below and a full EQSEIA at **Appendix 3**

6.5.1 Equalities – Includes ‘Fair and Inclusive’ as a key strategy principle with related actions.

6.5.2 Socio economic Duty – Is covered under the ‘Fair and Inclusive’ strategy principle and Action Plan e.g. countering digital exclusion due to affordability of equipment.

6.5.3 Islands – Are specifically referenced in the Strategy and EQSEIA.

6.6 Risk – Failure to maintain customer service standards has reputational and efficiency risks.

- 6.7 Climate Change – Is specifically referenced in the Strategy.
- 6.8 Customer Service – Is central to customer service delivery 2024-27.
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – UNCRC is specifically referenced in the Strategy and Action Plan.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: (Revised) Customer Service Strategy, Charter and Action Plan 2024-27.

Appendix 2: Summary of changes made to the Strategy considering customer and employee feedback.

Appendix 3: Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment – Customer Service Strategy.