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To: Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee

Date: 16 January 2015

Subject: KCC Customer Services Policy

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This paper provides an update on the development of a Customer Services Policy, aligned to the development of KCC as a strategic commissioning authority.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note progress on the development of the Customer Services Policy and to offer comments on the work to date ahead of finalisation.

1. Background & Context

- 1.1 Facing the Challenge places a heavy importance on the role of the customer in a commissioning authority: “By 2020, all KCC services will have a greater customer focus with services organised around the needs of service users and residents”.
- 1.2 Facing the Challenge also sets out the direction of travel for our changing relationship with the customer in a commissioning authority, and shifts the focus from improving our services through our historic understanding of customers experience, to a more fundamental understanding of service user needs, and engaging them in design and delivery of services.
- 1.3 This will be facilitated by KCC through the recently approved Commissioning Framework, enabling KCC to hold to account all service providers (both internal and external) for the customer service they provide on behalf of the Council, acting as a guarantor of customer service principles and standards.
- 1.4 In order to facilitate this approach, the Council must firstly define and agree the core customer service values and principles that it will require all commissioners and providers to uphold.
- 1.5 The development and agreement of the corporate Customer Services Policy will provide this, forming a keystone document (alongside the Commissioning and Outcomes Frameworks) towards the delivery of effective and agile commissioning, and the customer centric service approach outlined in Facing the Challenge.

2. Discussion

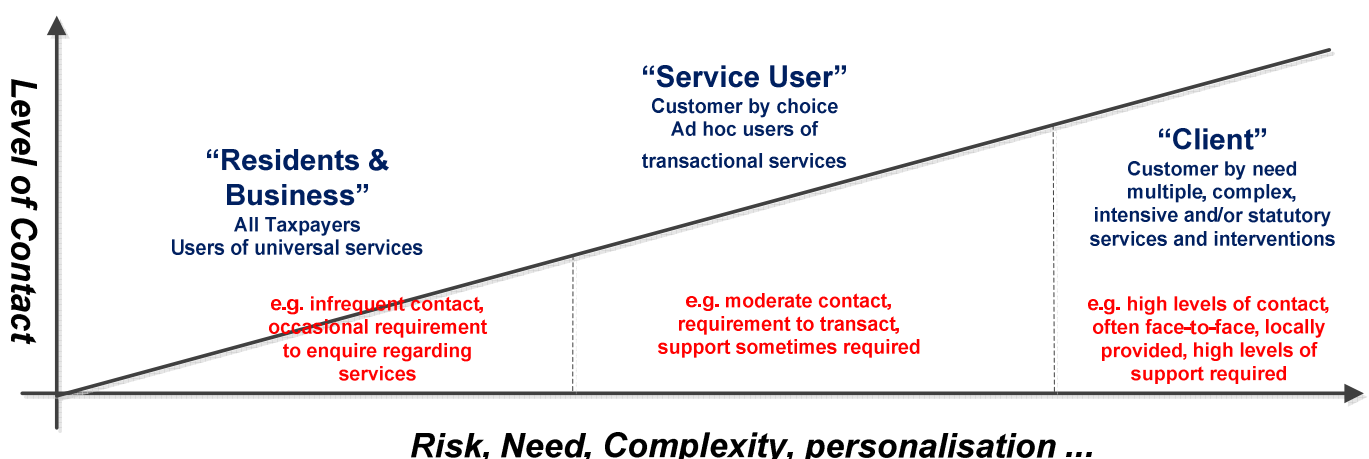
2.1 Defining our approach to customer service is an essential component of becoming a successful strategic commissioning authority. The starting point is to develop a deep understanding of our customers, their needs and preferences, and the way they live their lives so that we can identify outcomes that our services need to achieve.

We can then design and commission services in a way that places the customer at the centre, leading to different ways of working and delivering our services. This will also help us to understand and manage demand, preventing future needs and empowering our customers to live as independently as possible.

2.2 As other organisations start to deliver on our behalf more frequently, we also need to ensure that our customers receive a consistent level of service. This should apply regardless of how the customer chooses to make contact with us. To provide a seamless experience for our customers and remove costly duplication and inconsistency, we need to develop and implement universal principles for customer service. Anyone who uses our services is a customer of the council, not just the individual service or services that they interact with. The wider customer experience and how well KCC meets customers' needs across all of its services will ultimately determine customers' views of how KCC is performing as an organisation.

2.3 Who are our customers ? KCC provides a wide range of services to a diverse range of people. The relationship we have with customers varies greatly depending on a number of factors, and individuals will very often have different relationships with different services. Often there are varying levels of need, complexity, risk, and need for personalisation, alongside varying levels of contact with KCC.

2.4 Various terms and language can be used to describe our customers. One size does not fit all – however it is possible to describe our customers in three broad groupings as below



2.5 Delivery strategies for each of these groups may by necessity differ and will require differing approaches and commissioning strategies. People may move between these groups at different points in their lives, depending on a range of factors and influences. The Customer Services Policy will provide the overarching core principles around which commissioners can shape services to (and with) these groups whilst maintaining the core values of KCC.

- 2.6 Cost is an increasingly significant factor in the customer service equation. With the Council facing unprecedented financial pressure over coming years there is a need to ensure every penny is used to maximum effect. All of our principles and values will need to be underpinned with a sound understanding of cost and effectiveness, and this will form an integral part of the commissioning regime.
- 2.7 Moving to 'digital by default' delivery will assist in this regard, however it will be important to ensure that every service fully understands its 'cost to serve' – including direct costs to the service (e.g. staff, premises, systems etc.) and those costs accrued elsewhere as a result of the service (e.g. Contact Point, Website, corporate support etc.)
- 2.8 Service design solutions to be brought forward must incorporate a full 'cost to serve' analysis and demonstrate how all elements of service delivery will be funded and made more efficient and effective through new arrangements. Alterations to service delivery or policy amendments that generate customer contact must also be considered carefully in terms of cost and volume in order to ensure they are affordable, and customer service policy principles are not compromised.

3. Benefits

- 3.1 The adoption of a Customer Services Policy for KCC will provide a range of benefits for customers, commissioners and providers of service, and importantly to Members responsible for KCC provision.
- 3.2 Headline benefits are summarised in the following table

	BENEFITS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY
KCC Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide control and ownership of the customer service delivered by all services that KCC is responsible for, regardless of who is providing them • Allow Members to more easily hold providers to account on service delivery for residents and quickly resolve customer service problems • Support Members to manage reputational and financial risk • Support Members to ensure KCC is getting value for money from every service
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies and reinforces KCC's customer service values and principles • Provides consistency in customer service received, irrespective of provider or channel - people know what to expect • Gives confidence that services will be delivered in a way that is customer centric • Ensures that customer data and intelligence is used to shape our services for customers throughout the commissioning cycle • Ensures customers are involved and listened to in service design and operation.
Commissioners of KCC services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a clear expectation and framework for commissioners to utilise when specifying services • Ensures a deep, shared understanding of customers is

	<p>developed across the board to support effective commissioning and to inform future service design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps commissioners to manage the delivery of services against predetermined principles • Support commissioners to ensure KCC is getting value for money from every service
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4. Customer Service Priorities and Principles

The Customer Service Policy describes KCC's fundamental priorities and principles which should be applied across the board when delivering services to its customers, regardless of customer group and regardless of chosen provider. These can be summarised as: -

4.1 Delivering Quality

As KCC moves to become a strategic commissioner of services, there will increasingly be a mixed economy of service providers. Providers will be required to meet prescribed levels of service across various channels with consistent quality and standards.

- a set of minimum operational service standards will be developed for each service in line with the customer groupings described and the principles within this policy
- customer service expectations and mechanisms by which these will be monitored and upheld must be 'front and centre' in all commissioning activity
- commissioners will be required to ensure adherence to the customer service policy throughout the supply chain

4.2 Customer Focused Services

KCC will ensure that its customers can access its services in the way they require and in the most flexible form so that convenience is maximised and efficiency and best value driven through on behalf of Kent's taxpayers.

- services will be 'digital by design'
- service provision will be inclusive and responsive to customer need
- commissioners and providers will be expected to demonstrate how digital delivery is incorporated into service design, and how other channels will be used in support of the service and in line with this policy

4.3 Intelligent Commissioning

KCC requires all services to collect and feed back a range of customer data and intelligence in order to inform its commissioning and to ensure that all services are fully aligned to customer needs.

- we will develop a deep understanding of our customers, their needs and how and why they access our services
- commissioners and service providers will be required to collect qualitative and quantitative information about our customers and use this intelligently to improve services

- customers must be involved in service design and operation. We will require all commissioners and providers to demonstrate how this is being achieved

5. Alignment with Commissioning and Outcomes Framework

- 5.1 The Customer Service Policy is designed to sit alongside a set of key policy documents within the KCC Policy Framework which will together drive the organisations behaviour as a strategic commissioning authority.
- 5.2 The Outcomes Framework will determine the outcomes we are seeking as an authority over coming years, and fundamental shift of commissioning for these outcomes, rather than specifying inputs.
- 5.3 The Commissioning Framework outlines the strategic approach to be taken to the delivery of services and the commissioning cycle to be followed in analysing demand, reviewing, implementing and managing service provision towards the prescribed outcomes.
- 5.4 The Customer Service Policy describes the principles of customer service that along with the Outcomes Framework defines the organisations service delivery moving forwards (the 'what') and this will be underpinned by an effective and empowered delivery strategy (the 'how') in order to ensure that the policy principles described are effectively and consistently applied.

7. Recommendation

Members are asked to note the developments around the Customer Service Policy and to offer comments on the attached draft ahead of finalisation.

Responsible Officers:

David Whittle – Head of Policy & Strategic Relationships

Jane Kendal – Head of Customer Services

Attached – Draft Customer Service Policy – Appendix 1