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## Policy and Finance Committee

**Date:** 26 July 2021

**Title:** Customer Service Strategy

**Purpose of the Report:**

To seek Committee approval of a Customer Service Strategy.

**Contact Officer:**

Sarah Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk

<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>	LLTC Five Year Plan – Aim 1: Operational Efficiency, Objective 1 (To regularly review how we communicate and seek to embrace new technologies) Objective 4 (To develop a customer service strategy)	
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	No	
<b>Human Resources</b>	No	
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	Yes	To set standards for service delivery to residents.
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>	No	
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>	No	
<b>Environmental Aims</b>	Yes	To maximise the information available online thereby reducing printing and reduce journeys to visit the Council.

### 1 RECOMMENDATION/S

Should members be minded, the proposals are:

- 1.1 To note the report, including proposed opening hours for the White House and central telephone enquiry line.
- 1.2 To consider recommending to Council approval of the Customer Service Strategy.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 Development of a Customer Service Strategy is a key objective in the Town Council's Five Year Plan for 2019-2024 and has evolved from a recognition that the way residents communicate with us has changed significantly over the past few years.

2.2 Historically most transactions with residents have been either face to face or by telephone. However, developments in technology and changes in the way people seek information has shown a marked increase in contact by email, website and social media over recent years. The Town Council has responded to this with increasing investment into its website and electronic communications.

2.3 During late 2019, the Central Services team undertook an exercise to log the day, time and purpose of all resident communications. This report was taken to Committee in February 2020 and identified certain trends:

- Mornings are busier than afternoons
- Contact prior to official opening at 9am
- Out of hours calls low
- Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays are the busiest days
- 83% of incoming contact was for LLTC areas of responsibility

2.4 The intention had been to repeat this exercise in March 2020 with a view to breaking down time slots further, particularly at the start and end of the day. However, this work was indefinitely delayed due to the pandemic, the closure of the office and the fragmented working situation which ensued, with the reception responsibilities covered from home by several staff on a rota system.

2.5 Since March 2021 and the end of "lockdown 3", the majority of reception enquiries have been handled from the White House. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the trend for more early morning enquiries and fewer late afternoon enquiries continues.

## **3 PROPOSALS**

3.1 Following the recent Government announcement in respect of the final stage of the road map out of lockdown, it is proposed to re-open the White House to the public from Monday, 19 July.

3.2 In recognition of reduced staffing levels due to summer holidays and not all employees yet having returned to office working, opening the building to the public will be subject to there being a minimum number of people in the building and on reduced hours of 9:30am – 3:30pm Monday to Friday.

3.3 Residents will be encouraged to make specific appointments with the person they wish to see, in advance, to ensure that person is available. Appointments will be offered during core hours, but meetings outside of those hours will still be possible by prior arrangement.

3.4 Despite the official lifting of restrictions, a number of Covid related health and safety measures will remain in place at the White House including a QR code being available for use with the Covid-19 app, hand sanitiser being available, masks being optional, screens to remain in place at the Reception desk.

3.5 Alongside this, it is proposed to trial a revision of opening times for the main telephone enquiry line, to start earlier at 8:30am and to finish earlier at 4:30pm.

3.6 Missed calls and calls going to voicemail will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

3.7 It is anticipated that the move to the new telephone system provider in September will allow much easier tracking and reporting of call statistics and this information will help inform any decisions regarding whether to revert to original hours, keep the revised hours or whether to make any further changes.

3.8 Committee is asked to note that this is on a trial basis for the time being as any permanent changes may have implications for employees' contractual working hours.

3.9 The Council's overarching priority is to ensure high standards of customer service and to this end, the Committee is asked to consider recommending approval of the **attached** Customer Service Strategy, which will apply to all employees regardless of role.

3.10 The Strategy also sets out the Council's understanding that the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated an already existing change in people's habits – an increasing move towards a self-service culture whereby people can access the information they need online, from wherever they are, 24/7. Whilst recognising that this may not be appropriate for all, continuing to invest in online communications will benefit a majority of residents whilst also reinforcing the Council's environmental ambitions, by reducing reliance on paper and the need to make a journey to visit the Council offices.

**End.**