



**Audit Committee 26th
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Item

Customer Journey Programme Update

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):		Alex Wagner – Deputy Council Leader & Communities	

1. Synopsis

This report provides an update on the progress of the Customer Journey Programme which is one of the key transformation areas identified to deliver the outcomes set out in The Shropshire Plan.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The customer journey refers to any way that our customers (our residents and businesses) connect, interact and transact with the council, whether for simple or complex needs.
- 2.2 A review of our customer journey approach identified inconsistencies, variable service fulfilment, and satisfaction levels. There was also limited use of digital self-service and automation. This sometimes resulted in higher dissatisfaction, inefficient processes or service delivery, and increased 'failure demand' (e.g., customers needing to follow up on existing requests).
- 2.3 The customer programme aims to improve how customers interact with the council, ensuring they receive appropriate services promptly via suitable channels. Additionally, the programme seeks to enhance internal communications within the council to facilitate better coordination and efficiency.
- 2.4 The programme brings together several elements, with the two most significant being, customer journey digitalisation, and the delivery of community and family hubs. These are underpinned by interventions to overcome digital exclusion and promote culture change.
- 2.5 The aim of this approach is to create a 'digital by choice' approach, whereby simple processes and requests can be digitalised and automated so that we reduce the administrative burden and cost, while reducing the time taken to submit, and address, enquiries, and service requests. In turn, this will also

free our people to be able to prioritise their time on those most vulnerable or in need.

- 2.6 To deliver the customer digitalisation programme we have used the skills, expertise, and resources of Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC), our transformation partner, who have a track record of successfully delivering these projects with other Councils. They have supported us in creating a refreshed customer strategy to set direction, a comprehensive plan to deliver the strategy, and expertise to enable better use of new and emerging technologies (which the Council does not have in abundance and would be unable to recruit quickly).
- 2.7 Specifically, PwC provides technical and project support to our new Digital Delivery Unit (DDU), working alongside our in-house team to develop and deploy digital solutions that meet our service and customer needs, while transferring skills and knowledge to allow us to reduce the reliance on them and create our own internal capacity.
- 2.8 The DDU is our mechanism to deliver this major customer digital transformation project. It uses lean principles to reengineer processes, before developing reusable digital components and Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions, to radically improve the customer experience and journey. The DDU also enhances our internal technologies by deploying connections that reduce the need for officers to be involved in processing requested unless they are needed.
- 2.9 As we develop the core digital tools and components, and we raise the internal capabilities of our own teams, we will begin to reduce our reliance on external providers (such as PwC), making the DDU sustainable and affordable in the future.

3. Programme management governance and controls

- 3.1 The Executive Review Board (ERB) was accountable for the overall delivery of transformation programme, ensuring it was delivered on time, on budget, and in line with the agreed strategic objectives. Following the Senior Leadership restructure, the ERB has now been replaced by the Leadership Board which will assume the responsibilities for overall governance and oversight of the transformation programme. The sponsor for transformation overall, and ultimate decision-maker is Andy Begley (Chief Executive Officer).
- 3.2 The Customer Portfolio Board was responsible specifically for the governance of our customer portfolio, including the customer digital programme. The sponsor was Rachel Robinson (Executive Director, Public Health). The board met once a month and was accountable for delivery and budget. This included:
 - Making key delivery decisions, planning and activities within the agreed programme scope.
 - Monitoring progress of projects against agreed delivery plans.
 - Intra-programme risk and issue resolution and dependency management.
 - Submission of monthly highlight (status) reports to ERB.

- Providing a route of escalation to ERB.

3.3 The Customer Portfolio Board is in the process of being replaced but the responsibilities it had will sit with the Workforce and Customer Change Board, and the Sponsor is now Tanya Miles (Executive Director, DASS).

4. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report, the ambitions of our customer digital programme, progress to date, and the plans for the future.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

The risks associate with the programme are held within the Programme RAID Log and managed through the agreed governance structure (see section 3.1).

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The project enables efficiencies to support savings across the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This is either through the delivery of savings directly or through allowing us to release capacity from existing activity and so needing less resources (or people) to undertake that activity.
- 5.2 Any savings made, or capacity released may be from service budgets and, therefore, not necessarily allocated against the corporate savings line (ref EFF87 from MTFS). However, the full year effect of savings is expected to achieve the target set. This is a combination of savings from our investment in the digital programme as well as our community and family hubs.

Estimated Savings Delivery	Estimated Savings/Mitigations 24/25
Reductions in Customer Service Staffing due to automation/digital supporting reduced staffing requirement	£371,384
Children & Family Hubs Oswestry, Victoria Centre, Bridgenorth, Ludlow	£183,138
Reductions of costs in IT, transformation resource	£490,800
Total	£1,045,322

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 The project contributes to carbon reduction by ensuring that services can be accessed through online channels by people that can. For residents that prefer to phone high volume transitional calls will be automated and only the most vulnerable customers will need to speak to officers or use face to face services. The move to digital by choice will also reduce both customer and service need to travel thereby reducing emissions, as well as providing digital channels that remove the need for printing and paper use.

7. Background

- 7.1 The Time to Change survey, completed in June 2023, engaged 80% of the council staff and provided an overview of the amount of time people spent on specific tasks and activities. It identified that external customer management is highly duplicated, with 72.0% of all roles contributing to this activity.

This duplication results from multiple entry points into the Council, and so the following improvement actions were identified:

- Initiate a contact automation pilot to begin to reduce staff time spent on simple customer queries.
 - As part of the development of the strategic New Operating Model (NOM), consider the most effective future blueprint for customer contact across the organisation.
 - Implement a revised customer channel approach to optimise contact into the Council in line with resident needs.
- 7.2 A digital delivery programme and unit were created as part of the refreshed contract with PwC in April 2024, bringing in external expertise and capacity to support our own resources to digitalise and automate services. The aim is to provide a digital by choice approach to service provision that allows an improved and consistent customer experience and will be available even when services were 'closed'.
- 7.3 The rollout of current components has delivered £1m in recurrent savings with future improvement opportunities providing a further return on investment. The digitisation will be supported through the 'right sizing' of Council establishment, with the digital programme allowing capacity to be released so that it can either provide a saving or be used to add value.
- 7.4 The solutions are designed to address emerging issues or opportunities effectively. For instance, our voice automation solution has been instrumental in assisting with voter registration and garden waste subscriptions. This innovation has significantly reduced the volume of calls transferred to the contact centre, leading to decreased waiting times and allowing our staff to focus on helping those in greatest need. The implementation of voice automation for garden waste subscriptions was particularly successful, with 66% of calls handled by automation without requiring intervention from call centre personnel. Additionally, the automation

of voter registration services resulted in a cost avoidance of £10,000 in temporary agency staffing during this period.

- 7.5 There is an appreciation that some members of our communities may lack the sufficient digital skills to engage with our new tools, and so our Digital Skills Programme commissions providers from across Shropshire to deliver digital support to excluded and marginalised groups, ensuring residents are upskilled to be able to use digital services where they choose to. We also co-chair the Digital Inclusion Network (DIN), a cross-sector partnership focused on reducing digital exclusion in Shropshire. It brings together local government, health services, and community organisations to improve digital access, skills, and confidence—especially for vulnerable and rural populations. DIN also works to influence policy, share best practices, and ensure services remain accessible to all residents
- 7.6 In addition, our Shropshire Local teams, along with the Community and Family Hubs provide a complementary service where residents can get access to Wi-Fi connectivity and computers, as well as staff who can assist the most vulnerable in accessing digital services. They also ensure that those who prefer or need face-to-face interactions can still receive this support.
- 7.7 Significant elements of our digital solutions have been developed and deployed, so this programme is already making a difference to how we engage with our customers. Testing and validation of new online forms and voice automation commenced before Christmas, and implementation is being planned with relevant services. Implementation is being closely monitored and any issues addressed promptly so that any potential negative impacts are managed and addressed at pace.
- 7.8 The rollout of Community and Family Hubs also continues. They are a key part of our services to customers targeting local needs and offering preventative solutions. We now have five hubs that provide access points for essential services allowing us to take an integrated approach, working with other organisations across ‘the system’ to deliver services in local communities.
- 7.9 Our Community and Family Hubs are for all-ages providing a single access point, providing a ‘front door’ to universal services for families with children of all ages, and include services for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and a Start for Life offer at their core.
- 7.10 Beyond Children and Families, the hubs aim to support adults and older people to access the services and activities they need to keep themselves as independent and well as possible. This includes being able to connect with preventative health services, carer support, and other social support.
- 7.11 Hubs provide services and professionals with a shared space to make it easier for people of all ages to access the services they need, and these include physical locations, but also outreach support.

Appendices

[Shropshire Digital Skills Programme 2023 to 2026.docx](#)
