



Report to Scrutiny

Item Number:

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information

No

Subject of Report:	Digital Customer feedback from customer consultation.
Meeting:	Scrutiny Review Panel 4: Digital Services, 15 th December 2016
Service Report Author:	Louisa McDonald, Project Manager, Customer Services, Mcdonaldl@ealing.gov.uk . Tel: 020 8825 5758
Scrutiny Officer:	Harjeet Bains, Scrutiny Review Officer, Email: bainsh@ealing.gov.uk , Tel: 020-8825 7120
Cabinet Responsibility:	Councillor Yvonne Johnson (Finance, Performance and Customer Services) and Councillor Peter Mason (Prosperity, Skills, Employment and Transformation)
Director Responsibility:	Alison Reynolds, Director Customer Services. Reynolda@ealing.gov.uk Tel: 020 8825 5329
Brief:	To consider the feedback from the various digital customer consultation sessions that have recently been undertaken by Customer Services.
Recommendations:	The Panel is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- consider and comment on the information provided from the recent customer consultation sessions; and- make recommendations for further improvements accordingly.

1. Digital Customer

1.1 The digital strategy board have developed the following principles and strategic objectives to sit under the digital customer strand of the digital strategy:

Vision: “A connected place and smarter public services for residents, visitors and businesses”

Digital Customer: Customers will be able to easily connect with Ealing Council at a time and place convenient for them, they will only need to tell us once and can be confident that Ealing will get it right first time.

Revised principles:

- We will develop digital services to be better connected, accessible and convenient for residents.
- We will use digital solutions to help us to get things right first time.
- We will put residents at the heart of designing and improving digital services.
- We will design digital services that are easy to use, so residents choose to use them.
- We will provide support for those who need extra help.

Draft Strategic Objectives:

1. To create an exemplary customer services offer by creating accessible, better connected and easy to use digital services
2. To exploit and deliver digital solutions to ensure we get things right first time and residents chose to use them
3. To ensure we influence and adapt to customer demand and achieve the right resolution

Customer consultation – focus groups.

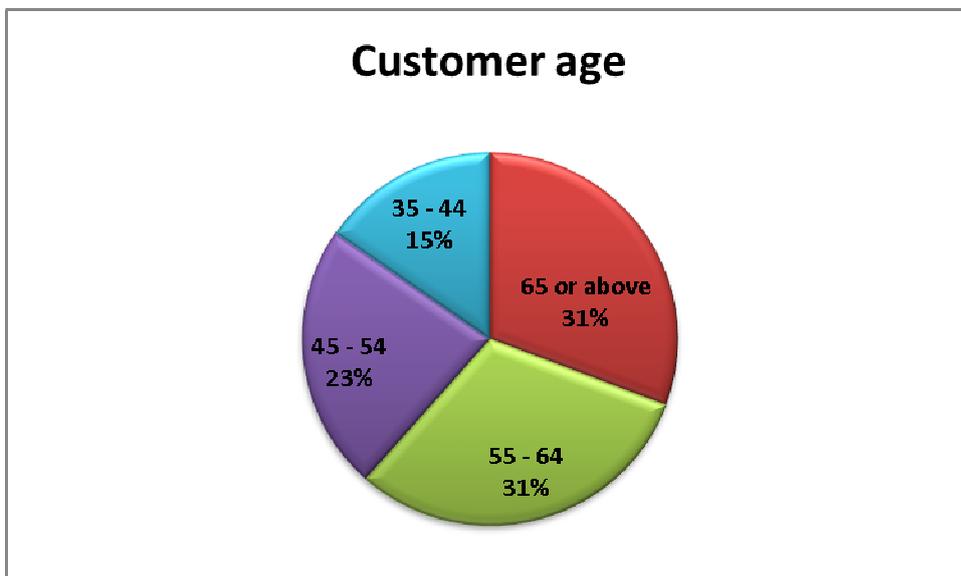
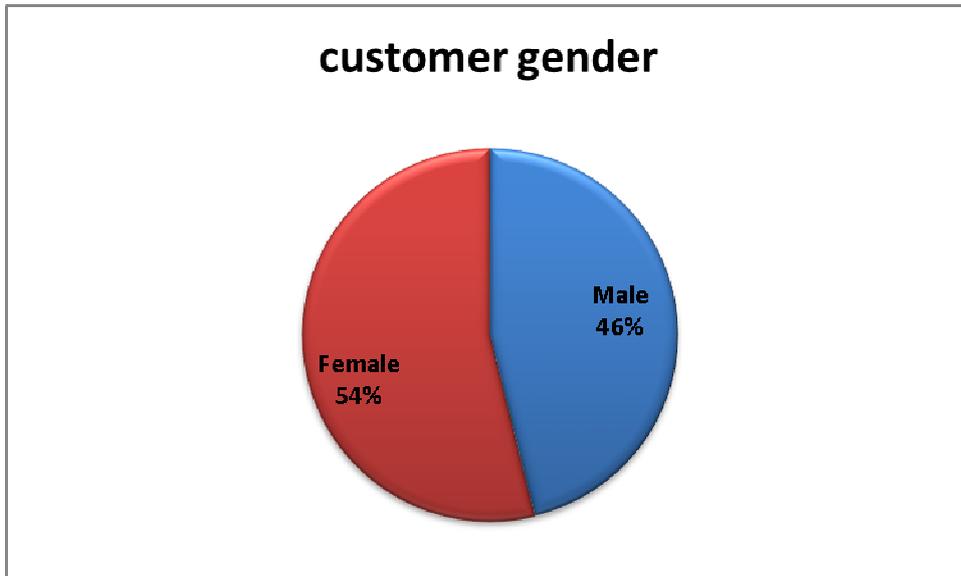
1.2 As part of the development of the digital strategy the customer services department has undertaken a series of customer consultation exercises in order to gain feedback from service users about their experiences of interacting with the council and how they envisage interacting with us in the future.

1.3 Residents signed up to the council’s marketing database were sent an email inviting them to attend one of two focus groups in October. The sessions lasted two hours and were scheduled both during the day and in the evening. There was no monetary incentive offered for customers who wished to attend. Customers interested in attending were asked to complete a short online survey in order to register their interest which provided us with their demographic information alongside high level details of their most recent interaction with the council.

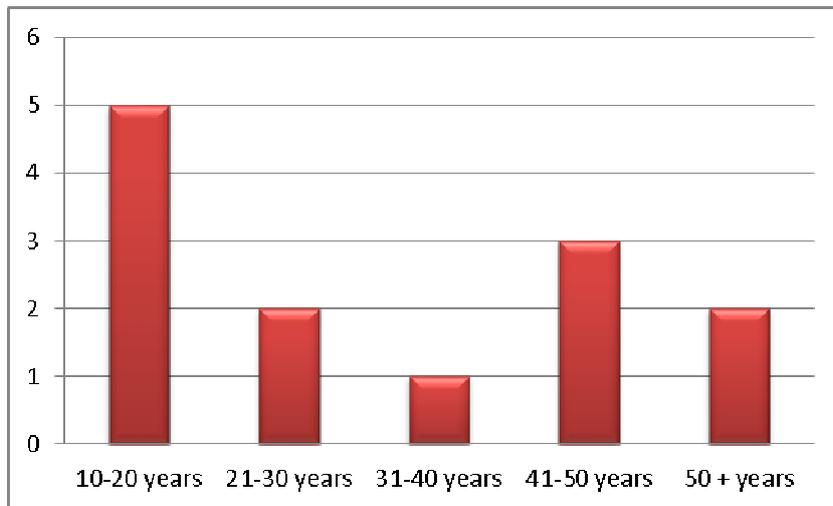
1.4 Over 100 residents completed the survey and of those 15 were invited to attend their chosen session. It was important that we invited residents who had been in contact with the council recently and provided a balance in terms of age and gender. A total of 13 residents attended, which made for two very productive sessions.

1.5 The combined outcomes from the sessions are outlined below:

Customer demographics:



How long have you lived in Ealing?



What is your favourite thing about Ealing?



1.6 Customers were first asked to describe their interactions with other organisations for example, utility companies or mobile phone providers. This was to ascertain whether or not they approach the council in a different way.

1.7 How would you feel if something went wrong?

- Angry
- Frustrated
- Anxious

1.8 How would you contact the organisation to let them know?

- Call straight away
- Prefer to call as can ask multiple question and get answers instantly
- Locate an enquiry form on the company's website
- Use web chat
- Go in branch (bank)
- Important issues (money) - will call as want clarification
- Unimportant issues – will email as happy to wait for an answer

1.9 Other key points:

- Would take the name of the person they spoke to
- Would prefer resolution was carried on online/over the phone and did not result in a face to face visit
- Do not want to be passed around from person to person
- Prefer to call if free phone number
- Good when advisor takes control and responsibility
- If passed around will take to social media to shame company into action
- Some customer groups may not be comfortable with email (issues with writing or language)
- Prefer email or web form as a conversation trail can be kept
- Would expect a response to email within 24hrs
- Happy to see someone face to face if an appointment can be made first

1.10 Focus then turned to the council and the customers were asked to provide one word or phrase that they associate with the council:



1.11 The groups then discussed each of the key service access channels in turn and provided their feedback.

1.12 Telephones

Experiences of contact the council via the telephone:

- Called regarding non delivery of wheelie bins – felt as if the issue was ‘my fault’
- No response to email so called as escalation
- Used website – request not fulfilled – called to discuss
- Got through quickly but poor experience
- Had a direct number for an officer but call went to out of date voicemail message
- Called to report a missed collection but was told was outside of service level – disappointed as information was not clear
- Wanted to escalate a wheelie bin problem but was told to go online to make a complaint
- Request for garden waste containers – called three times over a number of weeks (have to call as no alternative) – no containers delivered – raised with councillor – three containers arrived

1.13 Key points:

- No clear escalation for when things go wrong
- Lack of accountability from advisors
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of resolution

- Concerns over the councils disconnect with its customers
- If named officer is out of the office , someone within the team should pick up their calls
- Would be happy to wait up to 15 mins for call to be answered
- Would prefer option to know where they are held in the queue
- Would be happy to use a call back function and hang up
- Requests are logged but not fulfilled/completed
- 'Feel like I'm going round in circles'
- Transaction time to resolve issues is too long
- Hard to know who/find who to contact. Actually getting through to a person who can help takes time and can be frustrating.

1.14 Face to Face

It is worth noting that all participants in one of the focus groups were not aware that the council offered a face to face service and had never visited the council's customer service centre.

Experiences of contacting the council using the customer service centre:

- Visited to view planning information – only came in as was in the area
- Parking permits, resolution was given but was unhappy with process – prefer to transact from home
- Visited centre to attend a meeting with back office (social care)

1.15 Key points:

- Face to face seen as a last resort
- Face to face option needed for people who cannot use other methods
- Would like to see 'pop up' face to face surgeries throughout the borough
- Would use libraries to transact with the council
- If issue is not resolved online or on the telephone then would result in a face to face visit
- Reasons for not using this method: not convenient; parking difficulties; time consuming; other methods more convenient

1.16 Online

Experience of contacting the council using online services:

- Log fly tips on a weekly basis and find the web form easy and quick
- Attempted to log environmental issues using web form but address was not recognised
- Use myaccount services and find this useful and keen for new services to be added
- Email through enquiries to officers but these go unanswered

- Requested a recycling bin online but there is no option to progress chase online so resulted in a call to the council.

1.17 Key points:

- Preferred when street watchers mailbox was in place as issues were answered within 24 hrs – now need to use online services
- Prefer to use 3rd party sites such as fix my street
- Websites search function and A-Z is poor
- Would like to see departmental structure charts online so know who is responsible when something goes wrong
- Interactions needs to be quicker
- Content on the web not always up to date
- Issues with some online forms when using tablet device
- Issues raised around digital exclusion for those users who are not online or have little knowledge of using online services
- Council should offer a service to help residents fill in online forms
- Positive response to use of SMS to keep residents informed
- Prefer when online services offer an instant resolution e.g. can find the answer to my query one the website or can engage in webchat
- Very positive response to the introduction of web chat – all customers would use this function
- Customers would be happy to use portal functions (myAccount) if the system could remember their details so they do not need to be re-enter every time they log a report or service request.
- Services should be aware of problem areas (fly tipping) and action should be taken before a customer logs a report
- More corrective actions need to be carried out on digital requests or it loses credibility

1.18 The future:

How do you see yourself contacting the council in the future?

- Combination of all channels available
- Would prefer to contact via the telephone
- Majority of customers said they would start with the online services but would always want an alternative in place as a back up
- Would prefer to contact online but would want an instant response
- Not keen on contacting the council via social media – this should be used as a promotional tool only
- Telephone service will not be needed in the not too distant future
- Data should be used more effectively
 - Advisors should acknowledge previous reports when customer calls back
 - Online request should create a transaction log
 - Council systems should flag repeat issues

- 'Close the loop' customers should be informed when things have been done/completed
- Introduction of skype – speak to someone face to face without having to visit a centre
- Online networks for residents – e.g. 'My neighbour'
- Council should always offer an alternative for non-English speakers

1.19 MyAccount user survey

An online survey was sent to all MyAccount holders in September. The results have reinforced our understanding that customers find the portal useful and easy to use and provides us with tangible feedback that we can use to improve the service further. The survey received 1097 responses, with the majority of responses submitted in the first 24 hours.

Here is a snapshot of the results:

- 75% said it was easy to sign up for the portal.
- 68% said they could easily find what they were looking for via the portal
- 72% said that overall the portal was easy to use
- 73% said that overall the portal was useful
- 53% said that using the MyAccount portal enabled them to find information or carry out a transaction without needing to contact us.
- 44% said that they access their portal account either monthly or weekly with only 18% saying that they had not needed to sign in again since they registered.

The survey also provided us with qualitative feedback from our portal users which included positive feedback and areas for improvement.

1.20 What services / functions would you like to see added to MyAccount in the future?

- Pre population of all online forms
- Waste and recycling
- Live web chat
- Contact us option
- Housing rents
- Housing repairs
- Parking permits and vouchers
- Apply for housing
- Apply for a school place
- Make a complaint
- Respond to a consultation
- Planning services
- Information about roadworks
- A way to contact elected representatives
- Council tax exemptions
- Benefits eligibility calculator.
- Rubbish collection day / schedule
- Clear view of which council tax instalments have been paid / are outstanding.
- Explanations why benefits have been suspended.
- Update of address database
- Environmental problems for example fly tipping and abandoned cars.

1.21 Positive feedback:

“The account is simple and easy to use and meant that I can check what I need online without having to call.”

“I really like the idea of using myaccount which informed me of a lot of information which I didn't know. It's really helpful and I would like to thank you.”

“I've seen improvements during the last year. Keep moving on;)”

“I like it and it's very useful.”

“It's clear and I can see all my payments and instalments and that's very comfortable for me.”

“It's very user friendly and quick.”

“I find it easy to access information that I need.”

“It's really saving time.”

“The service is good and I find it useful.”

“Thank you very much. MyAccount has been very helpful.”

1.22 Areas for improvement:

General feedback:

“Convolutd. Not user friendly.”

“Very limited services offered through MyAccount, all interactions with the council should be linked and be track-able e.g. reports of missed rubbish collection etc.”

“It's not instinctive, pages and info needs to get tested by 'ordinary' users. Need additional explanatory pages.”

“In the end I called - it isn't very intuitive and the automated emails are unfriendly and you're not quite sure if a transaction has gone through.”

“As I want it to record my communications it should automatically recognise when I go to a council form that I have an account and automatically save the correspondence in my account.”

“The account should be set up to include all service you require of the council. In particular car parking permits and when these need to be renewed.”

“Does not cover enough of the council services, should cover all interactions not just council tax and housing benefit.”

“Should provide information services linked to the address e.g. planning applications, council notices, collection days. All should be visible in an easy to read dashboard.”

Logging in:

“Could not log in after several frustrating attempts to log in eventually painstakingly getting through to customer services who set me up.”

“It required too many boxes to be ticked, so to speak. All other log-ins I have simply require one's e-mail address and a password which THEY link to your accounts with them.”

“Too many security questions every time.”

“Too many clicks to sign in from ealing.gov.uk, too much text hiding log in button.”

Council tax:

“I can't see what I have to pay. I can't see clearly what I've paid already. I can't see my annual payment.”

“It didn't have all the details I wanted, like a history of invoices, and it's not very user friendly for navigating to specific pages.”

“Once logged in you can see your outstanding amount but all your instalments stay live and none are ticked off once payed. It would be useful if the months you have already payed are ticked or highlighted as payed.”

“My address is not on your database which means I can't access my account.”

Housing Benefits:

“I was trying to close my claim. This was impossible so I ended up phoning the office.”

“My account didn't tell me my claim had been suspended. Why?”

1.23 Designing council services of the future workshop, #Godigital:

A workshop made up of 18-24 year olds who work for the council was run to find out how they prefer to interact with organisations and access services. As the council's service users of the future, it is important to understand their expectations. A total of six 'young people' attended the workshop

Part of the workshop involved them discussing as a group, recent digital customer transactions they had experienced or heard about which had either impressed or surprised them and their minimum expectations of quality customer service and service access.

1.24 The following common themes were identified:

- Want to access services online, not on the telephone.
- Expect processes to include technology available today:
 - GPS location tracking
 - Instant notification at every stage of progress / change
 - Ability to track progress of requests including specific dates over SLAs

- Online account / app to access all services / record service history etc.
 - Online appointments at a time that suits them
 - Contactless payments / PayPal
 - A direct link to appropriate department
 - Sophisticated voice recognition including ‘chat bots’
 - Use of video where appropriate
 - A council ‘app’ which covers all services and would keep customer up to date via in app notifications
- Web pages need to be up to date with accurate and simple information and include contact telephone numbers in case you need to call.
 - Often there are too many channels that do the same thing which can make accessing service complicated.
 - Social media is important and should be used for customers to access services as well as for PR for organisations. Social media needs to be resourced appropriately.
 - Telephone menu options should include an ‘any other enquiry’ option.

1.25 Focus group with voluntary organisations.

In addition to the customer focus groups, a third session was held with local representatives from the voluntary sector. Working in partnership with Ealing Community Network, a number of groups were invited to attend a session on 6 December. (post agenda dispatch) Verbal feedback on this session can be shared at the scrutiny panel.

1.26 Next steps:

Activity	Timeline
Using feedback collated to inform the development of the projects that sit within the digital customer strand of the Digital Strategy	Oct 2016 – Feb 2017
Development of new Customer Service Strategy	Oct 2016 – Feb 2017
New Call centre telephony platform – Netcall	January 2017
Skype for Business	Complete by May 17
MyAccount – Love Clean Streets	December 2016
MyAccount – Housing rents	Early 2017
Online customer portal review	April 2017

2. Legal Implications
None

3. Financial Implications

4. Other Implications
None

5. Background Papers
None

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Department	Date Sent to Consultee	Date Response Received from Consultee	Comments Appear in Report Para:
Internal				
Director	Alison Reynolds	22.11.16	23.11.16	
Lawyer	Director of Legal Services			
Finance Officer	Director of Finance			
Councillor	Cabinet Member for			
External				
A N Other	Voluntary Organisation			
Police, etc.				

Report History

Decision Type: EITHER: For Information	Urgency item? No		
Authorised by Cabinet Member:	Date Report Drafted:	Report Deadline:	Date Report Sent:
	22.11.16	05.12.16	01.12.06
Report No.:	Report Author and Contact for Queries:		
	Louisa McDonald, Project Manager customer Services. 020 8825 5758		