Report to:	TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Steve Thompson, Director of Resources
Date of Meeting	16 June 2016

CORPORATE CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

1.0   Purpose of the report:

1.1   To provide information on the Corporate Customer Services Strategy and progress and findings of the channel shift project.

2.0   Recommendation:

2.1   To consider the contents of this report and provide feedback and recommendations to inform future plans as considered appropriate.

3.0   Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1   To allow Members the opportunity to engage with future developments.

3.2a   Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council?   No

3.2b   Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget?   Yes

3.3   Other alternative options to be considered:

None

4.0   Council Priority:

4.1   The relevant Council Priority is:

"The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"

5.0   Background Information

5.1   The Channel Shift Group was formed to ensure a systematic approach to moving services on-line where appropriate. This activity is essential to reduce demand on the face-to-face and telephone channels in Customer First following the reduction of resource in the service.

5.1.1   At the same time the Customer Service Strategic Group was formed to address the lack of a consistent approach to demand measurement, service standards and customer interactions in those Council services that do not deal directly with Customer First. The lack of customer focus in some areas ultimately creates failure demand and complaints, which put further pressure on the Customer First Team and Council services. The Strategic Customer Services Group has representation from each directorate, this ensures that all parts of the Council make customer service an integral part of their business.

5.1.2   The Channel Shift Group has developed a methodology, working with each service involved to progress to a digital channel where appropriate. This methodology has been used successfully in the first year of activities. The approach has so far been utilised with services who place a high demand on the Customer First Team or who create high levels of service failure, "chasing" or complaints. The Channel Shift Group has a focused membership with colleagues from Customer First, ICT and Communications (Web Site and Marketing) and delivers on an action plan based on highest areas of failure demand. Further information about the progress of the group in the first year can be found in Appendix 7a.

5.1.3   Every Directorate must buy into the process and own the change for their area. Reduced resources makes delivery of change essential if the Council is to maintain customer confidence and reduce unnecessary demand on services. Customers must do more to help themselves with our support.

5.1.4   The Customer Service Strategic Group has now developed a Strategy setting out the vision and principles which every service should strive to deliver when dealing with residents, business and clients; the Customer Services Strategy 2015-2020 (Appendix 7b).

5.2   **Vision**

5.2.1
- Every interaction with residents and customers will be the very best experience we can make it. We will continuously improve our staff performance, the tools we use and the processes for each area of service delivery so we improve satisfaction and drive out inefficiencies.
- Where possible, every request or issue will be resolved at first point of contact by systems and staff capable, empowered and supported.
- Residents and customers will be able to access a large number of services and monitor progress at all times via excellent internet facilities and by service updates sent to them.
- We encourage the use of internet and telephone services, but we will ensure other contact and service channels for residents and customers are also of a high standard and available to all.
- We measure ourselves better so we can improve our understanding of how services are performing, keep attuned to and up to date with resident and customer needs to take action promptly.
- We make sure Councillors, as the democratic representatives of residents, have access to information about service delivery so we can work together to focus on needs.

5.3   **Principles**

5.3.1
- Always try and learn from the experiences of people using our services (residents, customers, visitor and businesses).
- Make their problem our problem and make our starting position to take action.
- Always looking to change and improve.
- Be proud of what we do well.
- Offer support for those who need to become more able to help themselves.

5.4   **Methodology**

5.4.1   It has become clear that the methodology used to engage with services for channel shift activities also lends itself to identifying, establishing and developing service standards and measuring performance against those standards. This improves information and feedback provided to service users, helping to manage customer expectations and reduce chasing and failure demand for the service.

5.4.2   Colleagues from the Channel Shift Team have recently commenced the first activity for the Customer Service Strategy group working with the Licensing Team.

5.4.3   The methodology is a straightforward process but relies upon buy in, co-operation and, above all, honest conversations with the staff that do the work and the CLT member responsible for the work area.

Stage 1 – determine if there is an existing service standard, legislative timescales etc., is performance against the standard measured, what is the current position.

Stage 2 – can involve creating a standard where none exist or adjusting a standard where it is unrealistic given available resource. Members' decisions and feedback will play a crucial role in steering decisions of this nature.

Stage 3 – develop accurate measuring of standards, improvements to data collection, information to customers and feedback mechanisms.

Stage 4 – improvements to web pages/leaflets/letters etc. and may involve channel shift where appropriate.

Stage 5 – training and coaching which will include helping staff in the service to see the objectives, outcomes and behaviours in the Strategy as integral to their business and enable customers to help themselves wherever they can.

5.4.4   In addition to the work streams noted above the Council will engage with service users, representatives and partner organisations to deliver digital training and "get online campaigns".

5.5   **What has been achieved to date**

5.5.1   Successful Channel Shift/online projects to date include the following:

- A 12 month plan to redesign the look and feel of the Council's website making it more streamlined, user friendly and compatible with mobile devices.
- Introduction of new online reporting forms and changes to existing online forms to simplify them and make them more user friendly.
- The "contact us" page on the website has been amended to direct customers to areas of the website where they can help themselves.
- Introduction of a self-service web portal for Council Tax and Business Rates enquiries.
- Changes to the online payment section of the website to ensure it is compatible with modern internet browsers reducing the number of "failed" payments.
- Bulky Matters booking service has been developed, which allows collections to be booked and paid for online.
- Customers can go online and find out the status of their bin collection in real time. This is facilitated by the implementation of "in cab" technology in the waste services wagons.
- Online fly tip reporting introduced, which allows a customer to see if an incident has already been logged using an online interactive map, report an incident, see the current status of a report or request an automated update.
- Online application forms introduced for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Hardship awards.

- Implemented additional pick up points for brown bags, which has reduced the need to deliver them.
- Online application for residential green waste subscription service developed and implemented.
- "My area" of the Council website developed; this allows a resident to type in their postcode and information relevant to their location will be displayed. Information currently available includes local councillors, polling stations and bin collection days; more services will be added to this facility as the project progresses.
- Successful funding bids to the Local Government Association Digital Transformation fund, which will support the development of a Council app.
- Introduction of web-chat, which allows a real time interaction between the service user and an officer on the Council website. This has been used successfully by the Schools Admissions team.
- Introduction of an online calculator for the assessment of financial contributions to Social Care.
- Introduction of an online Deferred Payment Agreement (DPA) calculator. Once finalised this will allow a customer to complete an online Deferred Payment Agreement calculation and, if appropriate, complete a Deferred Payment Agreement application form.

5.6 **Outcomes**

5.6.1
- 100% of applications for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Hardship awards are completed online.
- Introduction of an online revenues portal to allow customers to view their Council Tax or Business Rates bill, set up a direct debit, make a payment arrangement or notify the Council of a change of address.
- 43% of Bulky Matter collection requests are now completed by the customer online.
- The number of "contact us" forms completed on the website has reduced by 14% in 2016 compared to 2015.
- There has been a 70% reduction in people reporting their bin as a missed collection in 2016 compared to 2015. This validates the initial research which showed that in the majority of cases the bin is not missed but is either contaminated or not presented for collection.
- Additional pick up points for brown bags has reduced the need to deliver them to households. There has been a 32% fall in Customer First completing requests for new brown bags in 2016 compared to 2015.
- Street cleansing teams now use hand held mobile devices to update back office systems directly. This has reduced the need for back office staff to input data manually.

- Society of Information Technology Management website score for the "Report a missed bin collection" improved from 1 to 4.
- Society of Information Technology Management score for the Council Tax section of the website improved from 1 to 3.
- Changes to forms used on the Council website now ensure data is passed directly into back office systems. This has reduced the requirement for duplicate keying by Customer First staff.
- Web chat is now used on average in 38% of Schools Admissions Team enquiries.
- In one month the "my area" section of the website has had 775 hits.

5.6.3   Additional statistics about the impact on the Channel Shift work are provided in Appendix 7c.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?   No

List of Appendices:
Appendix 7a - Channel Shift Progress Report to CLT February 2016
Appendix 7b - Customer Services Strategy 2015-2020
Appendix 7c - Channel Shift Data

6.0   Legal considerations:

6.1   Any redesign ensures that the Council still complies with any legislative requirements for the services affected.

7.0   Human Resources considerations:

7.1   The Channel Shift programme will enable delivery of essential services with diminishing resource.

8.0   Equalities considerations:

8.1   Equality Impact Analysis and action plans are considered as part of each separate Channel Shift initiative and adjustments made to ensure access to services remains easily available to those with protected characteristics.

9.0   Financial considerations:

9.1   The Council has made available funding to enable the Channel Shift agenda to be taken forward over a five year period. Return on investment will be achieved by reduction in costs going forward. This was based on successful delivery of year 1 objectives which are set out in the CLT Report attached at Appendix 1.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Consultation is undertaken on a case by case basis and can involve staff, service users, their representatives, portfolio holders and other elected members as each project develops.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None