Customer Experience Strategy

Engagement Outcomes Report

September 20 – October 18 2023

Contents

[Summary 2](#_Toc149136033)

[Project background 3](#_Toc149136034)

[Promotion and engagement methods 4](#_Toc149136035)

[Who did we hear from? 5](#_Toc149136036)

[Summary of feedback 6](#_Toc149136037)

[Next steps 9](#_Toc149136038)

[Appendix – Verbatim Comments 10](#_Toc149136039)

# Summary

The Inner West community was invited to provide feedback on Council’s draft Customer Experience Strategy from 20 September to 18 October 2023 for a period of 28 days.

During the engagement period:

* the Your Say project page was visited 344 times
* the draft Strategy was downloaded 95 times
* the draft Strategy was viewed 77 times through a flip book tool
* 75% of the total 12 respondents supported the strategy
* 11 participants completed the online survey
* 1 participant sent feedback via email.

The overall sentiment was positive and supportive of Council adopting the Customer Experience Strategy. Nine respondents were supportive, two were unsure and only one was not supportive. Respondents were also asked to explain their answer.

Respondents positively highlighted:

* customer service benchmarks
* digital improvements
* commitment to multicultural and inclusive services
* accurate reflection of community concerns and feedback.

Key suggestions for improvements included:

* inclusion of “Dementia-friendly community” as an action in the final Strategy
* delivery of a Council smartphone app earlier than FY25-26
* inclusion of assisting residents in dealing with other Government agencies

The survey comments also included general suggestions such as improving staff response to answering calls, authentication on the online portal and getting the basics right.

# Project background

Inner West Council developed a draft Customer Experience Strategy to cultivate a culture of service excellence, improve customer satisfaction and enhance the community’s experience when interacting with Council. The Strategy encapsulates Council’s vision for a great customer experience, establish key objectives, initiatives and presents a comprehensive three-year plan for implementation and continuous improvement.

A community engagement plan was developed to undertake broad consultation to get as many ideas and as much feedback as possible. Over 1,200 community members provided feedback during the engagement period. Feedback was collected through four in-person workshops, an online survey and a telephone survey.

Feedback and insights gained through the engagement process were analysed and developed into a draft Strategy to reflect the current and future needs of the community.

The draft Strategy was presented to Council on Tuesday 12 September 2023 and was endorsed to go on public exhibition for a period of 28 days.

The public exhibition ran from September 20 to October 18 2023. The community were invited to provide their level of support for the draft Customer Experience Strategy as well as any feedback for consideration in the final document.

The feedback has been reviewed, analysed and themed for inclusion in this report. All verbatim comments are contained in the Appendix.

# Promotion and engagement methods

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Promotion method | Stakeholders engaged |
| Project page on Your Say Inner West | **344** people viewed the project page  **95** downloads of the draft document |
| Emails to key stakeholders | **540** registered members on the Your Say Inner West platform  **194** residents who participate in the engagement session  **13** Local Democracy Group convenors |
| Council’s social media | **8** Organic Posts across Facebook and Instagram  **5,545** people reached  **227** people engaged (likes, comments and shares) |
| Promoted on posters and digital screens | **7** Council libraries  **3** Council service centres  **3** Council aquatic centres  **4** Saturday customer service stalls  **12** mobile outreach customer service stalls |
| Website | **10** days live banner on the website  **1** Web news announcement |

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| --- | --- |
| Engagement method | Stakeholders engaged |
| Your Say Inner West Online survey | **11** surveys completed |
| Direct contact from residents | **1** email from individuals |

# Who did we hear from?

55% of respondents were in the 65-79 age brackets while 37% were under 35 years of age. The 70-74 age bracket was the largest group of the respondents.

Most respondents lived in Marrickville South (27.7%) with an additional 7 suburbs represented across the remaining respondents.

# Summary of feedback

The overall feedback received was positive and supportive of Council’s commitment to improve Customer Experience through the goals and actions outlined in the draft Strategy. Respondents raised specific areas for review as well as general improvement feedback which is addressed below.

**Engagement Method – Your Say Inner West**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| You Said | Council response |
| Develop a Council smartphone app sooner than 2025-26. | The delivery of a Council app that delivers a high-quality experience is dependent on improvements to our core digital platforms that are being undertaken between 2023-2025.  The integration of ‘Snap, Send, Solve’ is intended to improve raising requests via mobile devices while these improvements take place. |
| Share more information on services being delivered at a ward level. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of action **4.2.1** – “Develop and display monthly customer experience performance to the community.” |
| Publish statistics on SLAs by request type. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of action **4.2.1** – “Develop and display monthly customer experience performance to the community.” |
| Improve the Council Request Form. | As noted in the comment, this improvement is captured under actions **2.1.4** – “Simplify service request categories” and **2.1.6** – “Redesign the customer service portal to easily capture requests and track progress.” The specific user experience provided is valuable feedback and has been passed onto the appropriate project team. |
| Improve the DA Search/Submission Form. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of actions **2.1.1 -** “Improve Council’s website to ensure it reflects better practice in customer centred design and meets community expectations and needs” and **2.1.6** - “Redesign the customer service portal to easily capture requests and track progress.” |
| Implement the latest reCAPTCHA technology. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of actions **2.1.1 -** “Improve Council’s website to ensure it reflects better practice in customer centred design and meets community expectations and needs” and **2.1.6** - “Redesign the customer service portal to easily capture requests and track progress.” |
| Stay logged in on trusted devices. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of actions **2.1.1** - “Improve Council’s website to ensure it reflects better practice in customer centred design and meets community expectations and needs” and **2.1.6** – “Redesign the customer service portal to easily capture requests and track progress.” |
| Ensure that someone answers the phone when residents call. | This feedback will be considered in the delivery of action **1.1.1** - “Develop and implement an ongoing internal education campaign to promote understanding and application of Council’s Purpose, Service Promise and Customer Experience Strategy across all service units.” |
| Advocate for the community with the NSW State Government and Transport NSW. | This feedback will be shared with Council’s Executive team. |

**Engagement Method – Email**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| You said | Council response |
| “Dementia-friendly community” should be mentioned in any report of Engagement Outcome including the final strategy document. | Becoming a dementia-friendly organisation is one of Council’s key priorities outlined in the **Healthy Ageing Strategy 2022 – 2025**.  This is an important consideration in delivering all aspects of Strategic Priority 3 – Embedding access and inclusion. |

# Next steps

Key themes identified in the engagement will be considered in the development of the final Customer Experience Strategy. The project team will assess and balance all feedback and consider conflicting views when producing the final document.

The final Customer Experience Strategy will then be presented to Council for adoption.

All community members who provided feedback will be advised when the final Strategy goes to Council.

# Appendix – Verbatim Comments

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| --- |
| **Please explain your answer** |
| This is just more bs to cover up the fact that Council can't get the basics right and it's never-ending need to find praise. It is pathetic. Even to the point of having to give the Council a star mark to move through this survey. Really this is infantile! |
| The emphasis on customer service is important. Also staff need to be supported so that they feel valued and they stay. |
| I attended the customer service forum at Marrickville library and feel that the council have done a good job of reflecting residents concerns and feedback into a well thought out plan.  Some items that I have noted that could be slightly improved are:  It would be nice to get a Council smartphone app sooner than 2025-26, especially given the value that this would bring to many quiet residents who do not tend to engage much with council due to time constraints.  In the interests of transparency there could be much more information shared on services being delivered at a ward level. This is already done for verge mowing and street cleaning: https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/live/information-for-residents/roads-and-footpaths/streetscape-maintenance  But I feel that it could be expanded for many more services. This would demonstrate that the merger is working and that everyone is getting an equal service level.  I have also noticed that requests submitted by phone tend to be actioned much sooner than the same requests submitted online for exactly the same request. Requests should be actioned based on priority, not how they were submitted. Council should publish statistics on SLAs by request type (online, phone, in-person) to demonstrate that this is no bias.  Also whilst I understand this is a specific item that would be covered under one of the items already in the strategy e.g. Continuously improve the service portal but I think it’s worth pointing out some of the issues I experience with the current portal that make it very frustrating to use and should be worked on as a priority -  Council Request Form: 1. Complex Captchas constantly required for every ticket submission, even after already being logged in. 2. General slowness when filling the form - seems to be a server-side issue 3. PDF attachments and images that were uploaded to tickets cannot be downloaded at a later date from the portal. 4. The system doesn't give you all of the history of the ticket in the email thread (initial email should send you your written request and any attachments). 5. Every email has a separate subject line so is not in the same email thread so it's very difficult for customers to keep track of correspondence. 6. All email correspondence are not able to be replied to so communication is one way once the ticket is submitted. 7. It should be possible for customers to reopen or close tickets. 8. There needs to be a council pending status so that tickets do not get closed off before they are actually resolved (looks like there’s now a "Work Order In Progress” status, but not all teams use it). DA Search/Submission Form: 1. It is not possible to share links with other people for a specific application/DA. Each DA should have a unique (shareable) URL that is accessible from both desktop and mobile (regardless of whether a user is logged in or not). 2. Currently when sharing a link users get directed to a generic IWC login page which causes a lot of confusion. Logging in should be done as a dialogue overlay on the page and not a redirection, especially given it is possible to browse as a guest anyway. Or at the minimum, a redirect back to the link should work. 3. Again general slowness 4. When creating a submission for a DA, it is only possible to enter 1000 characters meaning that for complex DAs, users will always need to attach a document which complicates the process and prohibits users from submitting feedback on their mobile. 5. The layout on mobile and desktop is terrible e.g. page is not sized to your screen. 6. There no clear indication of the result of a DA application e.g. PDA/2021/0213 is marked as 'Issued' and DA201800274 is marked as 'Determination Issued'. What do these mean - why can a user not see if the application has been approved or rejected in a plain English field? Or at the minimum have a lookup of what the terminology means. 7. When a DA is complete, both the Application Stage and Status fields mark the DA is 'Determined'. Shouldn't the Application Stage be Approved/Rejected so that it is possible to filter results based on this? |
| Well done to the IWC team for listening to the community through the input process for this, and putting together a solid plan that reflects the suggestions the community gave you! Great to see Snap, Send, Solve integration, an app, and upgraded online services firmly on the roadmap.  One small but quick improvement you could make quickly, is ensure the latest reCAPTCHA technology is implemented on current systems. As explained in this great video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UuvwY6CdLo) it should rarely be necessary to 'choose all the busses or street signs or firehydrants' at every stage of the request process. While using your requests portal on mobile, I need to do the reCAPTCHA process multiple times, every single time I submit a request. Your settings must not be set properly. Also, you should stay logged in on your trusted devices without having to log in every time. Hope that helps!  Look forward to seeing all these new improvement as the Strategy is implemented. |
| It would be great if when one telephones council one would receive an answer. Most times it is not the case. It seems that the staff are in constant meetings. No wonder nothing ever gets done! |
| It's a fantastic initiative especially all of the digital improvements. |
| Any self improvement is worthwhile and putting systems in place to ensure customer service benchmarks are achieved is great.  I feel the main problem the Council faces is dealing with other parties such as the NSW State Government and Transport NSW, in particular. The Mayor, Council and the Councillors need to advocate for our community and this means knocking on doors at State Parliament to get things done.  For example: Our community has Transport for NSW walls at Stanmore Station covered in graffiti. These walls at the station are also part of our main street along Trafalgar Street. These walls are a magnet for graffitists who vandalise our shopping centre and private homes and businesses along Trafalgar Street Stanmore.  We want TfNSW to completely cover these walls at the station with a wall mural and we want a level of service to remove the graffiti. There is also a structural crack in the station platform building and TfNSW hasn't committed to fixing it.  These walls are owned by TfNSW but the Council has a responsibility to make TfNSW accountable and responsible for this wall.  There are caravans, boats, trailers, jet skis taking up valuable on street parking. The IWC and the Mayor and Councillors need to talk to the Minister for Local Government and get laws changed. This could potentially be a revenue stream.  If the Council is having issues with planning because of road blocks by the NSW State Government then the Council, Mayor and Councillors need to start knock on Ministers' door in Macquarie Street.  We have a majority of Labor Councillors, a Labor NSW Government and a Labor Federal Government. There is no more excuses not to get things done. The Inner West Council is customer focussed and the staff at Council are wonderful but they are probably very frustrated like our community with Transport NSW and the NSW State Government. This needs to change. |
| "I support the strategies:-  - p.25 ""In all our dealings with you we will: Escalate your request...  Keep you updated on the progress...""  The priorities:-  - p.28 ""Improve first contact resolutions  Get back to customers to let them know how their enquiry is progressing""  - p.35 ""Council anywhere anytime:-  Seamless and personalised services""  - p.37 ""Strategic Mission: Foster a culture of service excellence  1.2 Customer service with a focus on resolving enquiries on first contact.""  Improvements needed:-  (i) simplification of procedures and/or application for any particular project or enquiry, rather than having to wait approx 10 business days for a reply then be given a Reference Code and await eventual response!  (ii) be able to speak easily and readily to any Council staff member and feel confident that my enquiry is going to be dealt with efficiently and timely." |
| The draft strategy lists lots of aspirational statements but they are not matched by a sufficient commitment to development of the integrated local knowledge systems required to enable it nor to the enhanced staff training and management comptence required to deliver it. |
| Strongly support council's ongoing commitment to providing multicultural and inclusive services. |
| Please do not equate the numbers of responders in support of an “immediate goal”, “2-year goal” and “5-year goal” with the importance of those goals (in those categories) based on more than just popularity or popular awareness. This is well-illustrated by dementia, and I respectfully suggest that a final strategy that is prioritised or publicised upon popularity (so to speak) and not incorporating importance (again so to speak) indicated by statistics, experts and people with special lived-experiences is potentially flawed policy – and time will increasingly demonstrate that flaw. Of course, this comment is not just limited to “dementia-friendly community”. There were other “important” goals I heard in the Haberfield meeting that did not rank in the top “popular” response numbers.  Dementia is presently the second leading cause of death in Australia and increasingly catching up to Ischaemic heart disease, and the highest cause now for women, and is characteristically – universally - preceded by many, many years of worsening impairment for the person and alteration of life course for their family; and for that “dementia-friendly community” is important. Especially as the Federal Government has already activated a policy to reduce funding of the same proportion of nursing home places as previously, for the alternative of care in the community. In fact, the nursing home industry has expressed surprise at the extent of the change that will be happening to completion by 2029.  Second, I do not think it is appropriate to address dementia and have a goal of a “dementia-friendly community” by merely broader reference to (disabling) medical diseases generally or “inclusiveness” – and before that dementia needs to be considered separately. This is not to dismiss or overlook the significance of any (disabling) medical disease or “inclusiveness”. It is because of two special features of “dementia”. In other words, let me address the question you might have now of “why dementia”.  First, dementia is not actually one disease as such, but a collection of (cognitive) symptoms that can appear in a number of diseases. Even in sporting head injuries or substance abuse. So, it's much, much wider than "any disease" . Second, diseases and/or most sets of symptoms take away a person's health. **Dementia takes away the person**. Big difference. A big relevant difference for engagement strategy when, even if you understand that you are being adversely affected by an aspect of the community, you are unable to advocate on your own behalf: both in making contact and expressing yourself.  For this reason, I would like to propose that “dementia-friendly community” should be mentioned specifically in any report of Engagement Outcome, not just in an exhaustive annexure of all proposals. Particularly, as “customer experience” as a routine Inner West Council function is itself a core aspect of having a “dementia-friendly community” – in two years. |