

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

6TH FEBRUARY 2008

CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY REVIEW

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Mike Webb, Portfolio for Customer Care and Customer Service, and Revenue Generation
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett, Assistant Chief Executive and Deb Poole, Head of E-Government and Customer Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report provides a review of the Council's customer performance since the Strategy was agreed in March 2006, a review of the strategic action plan and an updated action plan for the next three years.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:-

1. Note the improving customer performance of the Council (3.4, Appendix 1 Section 4).
2. Recognise that whilst the Council has made significant progress since the Strategy was approved in March 2006 much remains to be done to deliver excellent customer service.
3. Agree the Strategy's priorities for the year ahead and approve the detailed action plan to support the delivery of these priorities (Appendix 1 Section 8).

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2006 the Cabinet approved a Customer First Strategy for Bromsgrove District Council. At the time (and still) the primary focus of the Council has been to improve its basic performance, in particular, its Best Value performance indicators, which are critical to achieving a rating of "Fair" from the Audit Commission, when the Council is re-inspected in the Autumn of 2008. Nevertheless, the Strategy recognised that the long term ambition of the Council is to deliver both excellent performance, but also an excellent customer experience, comparable to the best in the private sector.
- 3.2 The Strategy took a holistic approach, based on international private

sector best practice, and looked to ensure there were actions designed to improve the customer service and culture of the Council across 12 themes.

3.3 A Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timebound (SMART) strategic action plan was agreed by Cabinet for these 12 themes. Progress against the action plan is reviewed in section 6 of the Strategy (Appendix 1). Besides progress against the action plan there have been a number of national developments since the Strategy was introduced, significantly, from April 2009, the Council will be subject to a new inspection framework – Comprehensive Area Assessment. The Council has also undergone a first Comprehensive Performance Assessment, a peer review from the I&DeA and has started to produce a range of customer satisfaction survey data, to compliment the already extensive customer data from the Customer Service Centre. Finally, Cabinet has taken the decision (with cross party support) to make a £6.7m investment in ICT to bring the Council's ICT up to the requirements of the Government's e-Government standard. All of this information is reviewed in the Strategy, before being brought together in an updated Customer First Strategic Action Plan (Appendix 1 Section 8).

3.4 The Council has made considerable progress since March 2006 including:-

- Customer First being one of the Council's four values and also one of the Council's five priorities;
- Improved performance at the Customer Service Centre, including a call resolution at the first point of contact now above 90% (November 2007).
- 72% of CSC customer would recommend the CSC to a friend (Customer Panel July 2007);
- 65% of customers were satisfied with the service received at the CSC (Customer Panel July 2007);
- a re-launched Council website;
- Customer First training for all staff (with a second wave taking place in February and March 2008);
- the roll out of complaints software across the Council;
- the introduction of a Customer Manual for all staff;
- the launch of the Council's All Inclusive Equalities Scheme, Equalities and Diversity Forum and Disabled User Group;
- staff recognition for customer service and improvement;

- senior management attendance at PACT meetings and the piloting of two area committees;
- a budget aligned to feedback received from residents; and
- performance for our Best Value performance indicators now being around the average for an English district council.

3.5 Despite these improvements, we are starting from a low base. Overall resident satisfaction has improved, but remains too low at 51% (Best Value Satisfaction Survey 2007).

3.6 Through the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), that replaces Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in April 2009, and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, we can expect an increased emphasis on “citizens”, “users” and “non-users” from Central Government and a new “duty of involvement”; however, none of these seem to really get to the heart of the often intangible ways an organisation works i.e. the mindset of the Council, which really deliver the level of customer care we aspire to.

3.7 Rather than look to the Government’s regulatory framework for local government for incentivisation, the Council needs to find its own approach. There does not seem to be an obvious and simple solution to achieving excellence in customer service; however, the original approach adopted in the Customer First Strategy of looking to ensure Customer First feeds through every aspect of the Council (in the 12 themes identified), underpinned by investment in ICT and a long term commitment to customer service from Members and senior management appears to be the correct way forward.

3.8 Finally, by the end of 2008/2009, the Council should have in place all the major processes required to deliver excellent customer service. The step change from average to excellence is likely to be less dramatic than the previous few years and more subtle, requiring us to maintain a strategic focus, but also ensure we make lots of small changes that improve customer service, along with embedding and refining our customer processes.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Some of the proposed actions will require business cases and budget bids for the 2009/2010 budget cycle. These are likely to be relatively small, apart from community transport.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 A new “duty to involve” the public will apply from 01 April 2009 (see Appendix 1 3.3).

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

6.1 Council Objective – Improvement and Council Priority – Customer

Service.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Delivery of benefits and savings from Spatial Project.
- Successful roll out of complaints software.
- Responding to requirements of new regulatory framework for local government and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

7.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- Delivery of benefits and savings from Spatial Project.

Risk Register: E-Government and Customer Services

Key Objective Ref No: 1

Key Objective: Spatial Project

- Successful roll out of complaints software.

Risk Register: Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance

Key Objective Ref No: 2

Key Objective: Effective Customer First Strategy

- Responding to requirements of new regulatory framework for local government and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007:

Risk Register: Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance

Key Objective Ref No: -

Key Objective: -

7.3 The third risk is not currently included in the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance risk register and needs to be added and cross checked to the corporate risk register.

8 CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Strategy is designed to improve customer service and care to our customers. The Council has a media plan for customer service, which includes press coverage on the launch of the Council's customer standards and complaints software.

Staff have been briefed about Customer First and all staff are being trained on Customer First Part 2 by 31 March 2008.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Equalities and Diversity are an integral part of the Council’s approach to customer service and the Strategy includes a number of actions to improve our customer service in this respect.

10. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Strategy is consistent with the Council’s VFM Strategy, in particular:-

- The Customer Panel will offer services increasing amounts of data on customer satisfaction which needs to be taken into account in any assessment of value for money; and
- Business cases will be required for a number of proposals in the Strategy e.g. community transport links, expansion of area committees.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues: Yes, community transport and future Customer Panel contract.
Personnel Issues: Yes, making the recruitment process more orientated to recruiting employees with a customer service aptitude.
Governance/Performance Management: Yes, more customer service measures in the corporate performance indicator set.
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act 1988: Yes, continued support for PACT and potential expansion of area committees.
Policy: None.
Environmental: Community transport is more environmentally friendly than individual taxis.

12. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes.
Chief Executive	Yes.
Executive Director (Partnerships & Projects)	Yes.
Executive Director (Services)	Yes.
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes.

Head of Financial Services	Yes.
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes.
Head of Organisational Development & HR	Yes.
Corporate Procurement Team	No.

13. WARDS AFFECTED

'All Wards'.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Customer First Strategy for Bromsgrove District,
Customer First Strategy Review, January 2008.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Customer First Strategy, Bromsgrove District Council, Cabinet March 2006.

Comprehensive Area Assessment, Joint Consultation, Audit Commission, November 2007.

Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance: Draft for Consultation, Department of Communities and Local Government, November 2007.

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