

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

03 JUNE 2009

CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY REVIEW

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Mike Webb, Portfolio for Community and Customer Engagement and Community Safety
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 recommends the adoption of a new Customer Access Strategy to replace the existing Customer First Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:-

1. Notes the significant improvement to the Council's customer performance over the last three years, in particular, the Customer Service Centre (5.41 Appendix 1).
2. Notes that while our process times are generally much improved, customer satisfaction (5.3 Table 2 Appendix 1) and staff satisfaction remain too low.
3. Agrees the proposed updated corporate customer standards (5.22 Appendix 1), which will be published later in the year to customers and inserted into each service business plan;
4. Notes the March 2009 CPA report recommendation, that a "culture of customer focus should be fully established at all levels within the Council" (6.4 Appendix 1);
5. Agrees the Strategy's priorities for the year ahead (9.1) and approve the detailed action plan to support the delivery of these priorities (11. Appendix 1); and
6. Agrees the Strategy scorecard 2009/2010 (10. Appendix 1), in particular, the customer measures and recognises the distance we still need to travel in order to become an excellent Council.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2006 the Cabinet approved a Customer First Strategy for Bromsgrove District Council. At the time the primary focus of the Council had been to improve its basic performance, in particular, its Best Value performance indicators, which were 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 (now 13, as we have added customer access on the advice of the Audit Commission).
- 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).
 - 73% of CSC customer would recommend the CSC to a friend (Customer Panel July 2007);
 - CSC answer times being consistently below 20 seconds;
 - a re-launched Council website;
 - Customer First training for all staff (with a third 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;

- performance for our Best Value performance indicators now being around the average for an English district council; and
- a CPA rating of Fair.

3.5 Despite these improvements, we started from a low base and overall satisfaction with the Council remains low (as does staff satisfaction).

3.6 Customer access focus groups undertaken in the Summer of 2008 indicated that our customers are happy with the existing access channels, but are not happy with basics like letter writing (for example, receiving multiple responses to their letters), answering voicemails, the style of letters, general responsiveness etc. We need to become more responsive, empathic, focused on outcomes and communicate better (including feedback). These are largely behavioural issues. The aim of the new Customer Access Strategy is to increase our focus on these areas over the next three years.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Some of the proposed actions will require business cases and budget bids for the 2010/2011 budget cycle. These include making the Improvement Manager a permanent appointment and additional funding for marketing activity e.g. a magazine aimed specifically at children and young people.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 A new “duty to involve” has applied from 01 April 2009.

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

6.1 Council Objective – Improvement and Council Value – Customer Service.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:
(list by bullet points up to a maximum of 3 as per the following example)

- 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*

Key Objective Ref No:17

Key Objective: Ensure the Council achieves at least a CPA fair rating and is prepared for CAA.

- 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.

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	At CMT.
Executive Director (Partnerships & Projects)	At CMT.
Executive Director (Services)	Yes.
Assistant Chief Executive	Author
Head of Financial Services	At CMT.
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	At CMT.
Head of Organisational Development & HR	At CMT.
Corporate Procurement Team	No.

13. WARDS AFFECTED

'All Wards'.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Customer Access Strategy for Bromsgrove District, June 2009.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

See bibliography in Strategy (14.)

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