
ACCESS TO SERVICES STRATEGY - UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report contains an update on progress following approval by the Executive Board on 11 December 2007 to the Access to Services Strategy.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2006 the Audit Commission undertook an Access to Services inspection. The report produced by the inspection team was considered by the former Policy, Finance and Strategic Performance Committee on 19 April 2007 and the recommendations agreed.
- 2.2 The recommendations were pursued firstly through the implementation of specific projects and secondly by using funding obtained through Building Capacity East for the employment of the consultancy firm Tribal to help build our capacity and knowledge in this area.
- 2.3 Tribal found during the course of their research that whilst the Council receives a high level of customer satisfaction, we resolve relatively few customer enquiries at first point of contact, we lose around 12% of calls, and transfer a number of callers before they reach the correct destination; this experience is also reflected in the feedback from the focus groups. There is also a view from our residents that extended operating hours would be welcomed.
- 2.4 To address these issues and meet increasing customer expectations, Tribal identified that we need to consolidate how we deal with customers to enable us to answer more questions on first contact, which in turn should enable us to achieve economies of scale. We need to develop our system of management of customer records so that we maintain a joined up view of each household/resident that identifies any special needs and also enables us or the customer to track service requests. We also need to further develop our website as it is a cost effective way for us to deliver services that can release resource to the frontline for those residents who need personal contact. However, we need to ensure we make these service enhancements without compromising the existing high level of customer satisfaction.
- 2.5 This culminated in a report to the Executive Board on 11 December 2007 that contained the Access to Services Strategy. The Executive Board approved the overall direction of the Access to Services Strategy, subject to the production of a detailed business case for the centralisation of the management of the frontline customer service with recognition that, in view of customer preference, a review of opening hours for face to face services aiming to extend the hours would be an appropriate aspiration.

3 ACCESS TO SERVICES – BUSINESS CASE

- 3.1 The detailed implementation of our Access to Services work has been managed by the internal Strategy and Partnership Management Team operating as a formal 'project board', chaired by the Chief Executive.
- 3.2 In developing the business case, four options for service delivery are being appraised. These are the separation of the reception service from the switchboard at the Rochford reception, the combination of the Rochford main reception with planning reception, the consolidation of telephone answering, and the combination of information and data management teams. Work is continuing on refining the data used to ensure the business case is robust.
- 3.3 The intention is that the service delivery model adopted will need to enhance the existing high level of customer satisfaction and be deliverable within the medium term financial strategy. Also, in view of the information technology implications, it will need to fit within the ICT contract renewal process that has to be re-tendered by March 2011.
- 3.4 Detailed work is continuing and the business case will be reported to the Executive Board for decision in June 2008.

4 ACCESS TO SERVICES - PROJECTS

- 4.1 In addition to the development of the business case, we have completed the following projects:-
- Implementation of mystery shopping of planning, revenues and benefits, refuse and recycling and housing services on a reciprocal basis with Castle Point and Southend Councils. Results have been analysed and the following lessons learnt and improvements made as a result:-
 - o Frequently asked questions are now available on the website for recycling issues.
 - o Additional web pages have been produced in revenues and benefits.
 - o A corporate signature for use on emails has been agreed.
 - o Telephone answering procedures have been refreshed.
- A second round of mystery shopping will take place in late May/June 2008, and will be expanded into the leisure service.
- The complaints procedure has been reviewed (as reported to the Executive Board on 6 February 2008) and a corporate approach to learning from complaints put in place. The complaints recorded for the final quarter of 2007/08 from January to March 2008 are attached in Appendix 1. With effect from 1 April 2008 the new complaints procedure

is in operation and so, in future, the Executive Board will receive more detailed reports in this area.

- Translation arrangements have been reviewed to ensure best value and a flowchart procedure for staff to follow to ensure that we can provide consistent services for non-English speaking customers and those with vision and/or hearing impairments.
- The 'welcome pack' for new residents moving into the District has been overhauled, including the production of an A-Z of Council services.
- The Citizen's Panel has been refreshed and focus groups have been held to assist service development including, for example, in determining the Access to Services Strategy, the website development strategy and the new recycling contract.
- A 'customer insight' area has been developed on the Intranet to share knowledge and understanding amongst staff of our communities and their specific needs and preferences.
- A 'customer services' area has been established on the Intranet to bring together all our policies and procedures relating to customer services – such as the complaints procedure, translation procedure and telephone answering protocol.
- Business process re-engineering workshops have been held to optimise the frontline customer service for the new recycling contracts.

4.2 As reported to the Executive Board in December, in addition to the development of the business case, we will continue to work on the following projects in the next 6-9 months:-

- SMS text pilots (for young people, people with hearing impairments, antisocial behaviour, hotline and feasibility on parking fine payments).
- Feasibility studies of working with partners to develop services in Hullbridge, Great Wakering and Hockley.
- Limited expansion of customer services at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The business case to implement the Access to Services Strategy is being developed to ensure that it is achievable within the medium term financial strategy.

6 RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The business case will have a full risk assessment attached to it.

6.2 In overall terms, there is a risk to the Council's reputation and future inspections if we do not continue to develop and improve our services following the Audit Commission's Access to Services inspection.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Board **RESOLVES**

- (1) To note the work carried out to date to implement the Access Services Strategy.
- (2) To note the complaints statistics for January to March 2008.
- (3) To agree to consider the full business case for the transformation of the frontline customer service at the Executive Board in June 2008.

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Background Papers:-

None

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**Number of complaints received by each division showing complaint type -
January – March 2008**

<u>DEPARTMENT</u>	<u>COMPLAINT TYPE</u>					<u>DEPT.TOTAL</u>
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	
Information & Customer Services						0
Corporate Policy /Human Resources						0
Finance, Audit & Performance Management			1			1
Community Services	1		7		3	11
Environmental Services		17		3	3	23
Legal Services						0
Planning & Transportation	1	1	7	3	1	14
TOTAL	2	18	15	6	7	49

Key:

- 1 - Timeliness/delays
- 2 - Service errors/task not done
- 3 - Dissatisfied with Council policy/processes
- 4 - Dissatisfied with staff attitude
- 5 - Other