



Cambridge City Council

Customer Access Strategy

2012 - 2015

Putting Our Customers First



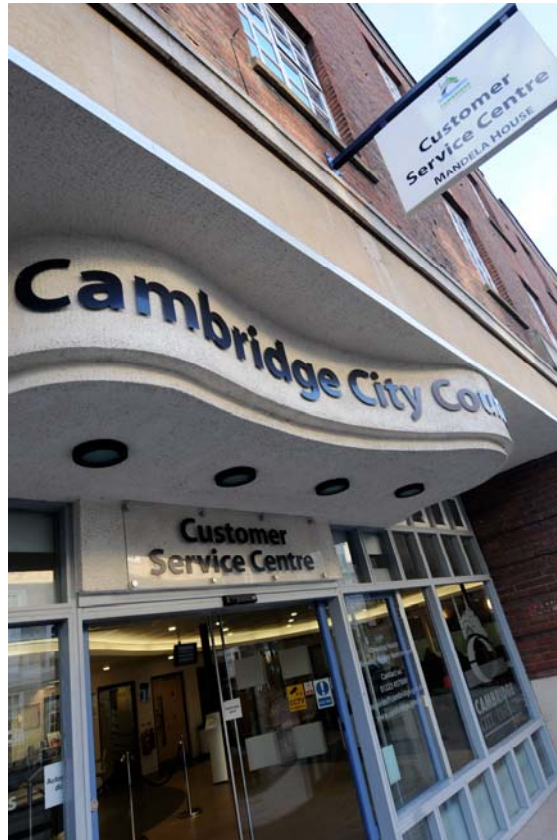
Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	What difference will the strategy make to customers?	4
3.0	Key themes	5
	• 3.1 Customer Channel Management	
	• 3.2 Customer choice and control	
	• 3.3 Engaging with our customers	
	• 3.4 Marketing Products and Services	
	• 3.5 Leadership	
4.0	Customer Charter and Service Standards.....	9
5.0	How will the strategy be delivered	11
6.0	Improvement plan	13
7.0	Document Control Page	16
	1. Document Identification	
	2. History	



1.0 Introduction

The implementation of the first Customer Access Strategy (CAS) in 2008 has seen the continued development of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to provide more joined-up services. Since its inception the CSC has brought together an increased range of services to customers through the contact centre, on-line services, face to face and payments (formerly cashiers) in one location and over extended hours of operation. This has been completed with minimal disruption to both service provision and adverse effects to overall performance.



Now that the first CAS strategy has been completed there is a need for more fundamental change to reflect the changing needs of customers and the changes in society as a whole. The change will need to be driven by innovation at all levels and in all ways – people, processes, and technology. We need to develop multiple ways for customers to access our services. These channels will harness technology to improve the speed and flexibility of service provision. Services that are provided in partnership should also be developed to allow greater flexibility and ease of access.

We need to undertake further work collaboratively with internal and external partners e.g. Cambridge Citizen Advice Bureau, to explore front line customer service improvements. We also need to consider the options for shared services with other partners including the County Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

1.1 Customer Access Strategy 2011 -2014

This new strategy outlines the Council's vision for customer service over the next three years. The strategy has been designed to be a "high level" document setting out the overarching framework for customer service in Cambridge City. It builds on the implementation of the first Customer Access Strategy (CAS) and the continued development of services in the Customer Service Centre (CSC) over the last three years to provide more joined-up services.

The strategy aims to put the customer first – at the heart of everything the Council does. It recognises the importance of the customers' needs in the City, which is diverse and tolerant, values activities, which bring people together and where everyone feels they have a stake in the community. The strategy builds on the Council's vision for the city, where people matter, is a good place to live, learn and work and we care for the planet. It also includes our revised customer service standards for the Council.

A key consideration in the development of and the implementation of our strategy is that the structure and organisation of the Council are not important to customers trying to access Council services - rather the ease of accessibility, quality and speed of response is what counts. In essence, this strategy and its associated projects and initiatives aim to continue the improvement in the quality of customer experience, initiated in the first CAS.

In continuing to improve how we work we will review our services to ensure that they are designed with our customers' wishes and needs in mind and also offer value for money. The Council has an ambitious programme of service reviews and other service changes to ensure our services are focussed on understanding and meeting customer needs, delivering high quality services in the context of policy and legislative changes, and rising or changing demands from residents. All of which must be done within the (shrinking) resources available. The strategy impacts on everyone from the park rangers, planners and refuse crews to those working in the Corn Exchange, customer contact centre staff and public protection officers.

This strategic document sets out:

- One Council Approach: Whichever route a customer chooses to contact the council, they will receive a consistent level of customer care.
- The improvement in service delivery and choice of communication channels that customers can expect to experience over the next 3 years.
- The priority areas for us to focus on to be able to deliver this change.
- How we will manage the change.
- An action plan for implementing change required within each priority area.

The main principle will be to maintain and implement a service design and delivery strategy, which improves the quality of council services, creates significant take-up

by electronic channels and results in cost savings. The principle is predicated on the idea that a high quality service will meet customer need and be efficient to run.

2.0 What difference will the strategy make to customers?

Our aim is for all customers to experience:

- Confidence in the Council's ability to deliver to what it promises.
- Transparency of what services the Council provides.
- Being able to track where they are in a process and the resolution delivery time.
- Courteous and friendly attitude from all Council representatives.
- A sense of one Council working for them, not them working through several Council departments.
- Increased opportunities to choose the way they would like to contact, transact and communicate with the Council.
- Multiple ways of engaging with the services of both the council and the rest of the public and voluntary sector.
- Increasing value for money in service provision.
- Greater influence on how services are delivered.

The strategies overall objectives are:

1. Value our customers
2. Improve customer satisfaction
3. Through consultation and feedback listen to our customers and respond
4. Deliver better access - more convenient, easier and quicker
5. Customers serve themselves where possible

3.0 What are the key themes of this strategy?

This strategy will focus on the five key themes:

1. Customer channel management
2. Customer choice and control
3. Engaging with our customers
4. Marketing products and services
5. Leadership

Below is a summary of each theme and why it is a priority for delivering excellent customer service.

3.1 Customer Channel management



We recognise through the Citizen Survey that customers and residents will continue to want to contact us by phone and in person at the customer contact centre.

These key channels will continue to be invested in but we plan to develop multiple ways for customers to access our services so people have greater choice. These channels will harness what technology we can offer to improve the speed and flexibility of service provision. Services that are provided in partnership will also be developed to allow greater flexibility and ease of access. Priority areas will have to deliver:

- New electronic channel options – e.g. (SMS) text messaging and social networking.
- Incentives to self-service where it is appropriate e.g. Council Tax online and automated cashiering machines
- Integrated channels with partners where joint services are provided e.g. Cambridge Citizen Advice Bureau.

Customer Service Centre

We will use the Customer Service Centre as the primary driver for change, improving the quality, consistency and accessibility of services we provide to customers. As the Council continues to focus on service improvements, further economies and efficiencies will follow as more services are taken on board accordingly.

Equality and diversity

The Council adopts a design for all approach where all customer needs are met irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnic origin, race, religion or geographical location. We provide multiple access channels, together with the provision of multi

agency, joined up services working closely with other councils, agencies and charities. In this way, we hope to make it as simple as we can for a customer to request and receive a service.

Cambridge City Council believes in the dignity of all people and their right to respect and equality of opportunity. We value the strength that comes with difference and the positive contribution that diversity brings to our city.

Managing diversity in service delivery is about providing appropriate services, according to need, for everyone in the City. We aim to offer high quality services by recognising the diversity of our customers and acting to ensure that individual needs are met. All our reception facilities are fully accessible to people with disabilities, customers who use languages other than English, and those who might otherwise find it difficult to access services.

As a service provider, we will ensure that:

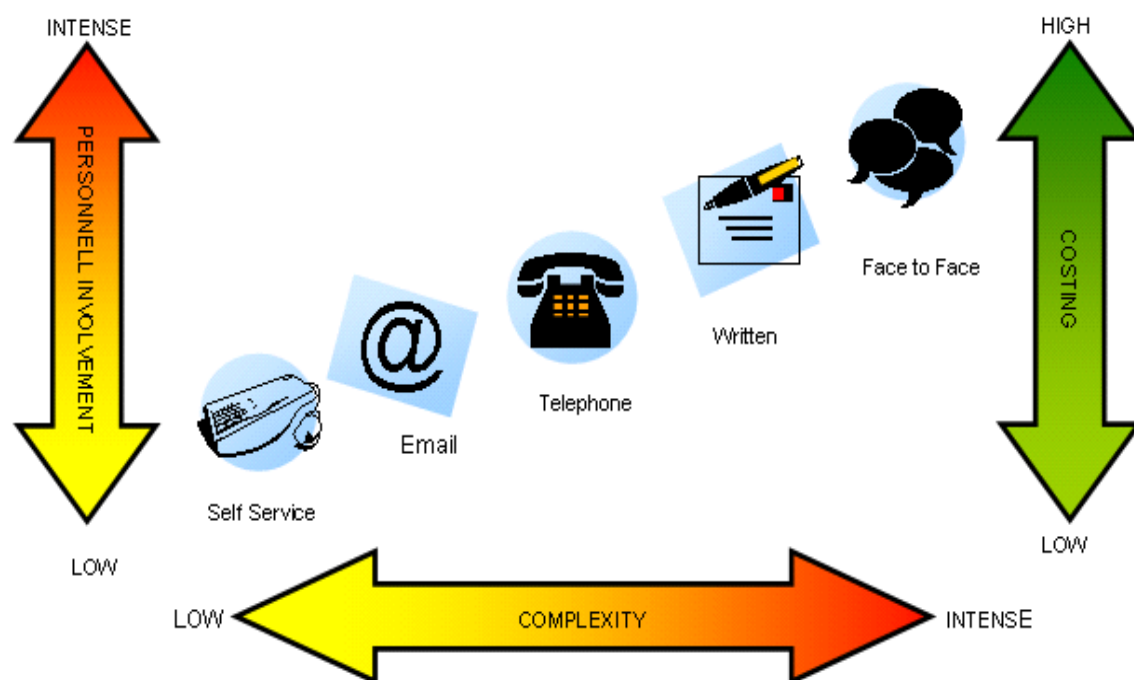
- service users receive fair, sensitive and equal treatment
- services are relevant and responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our local population
- services, buildings and information are fully accessible, particularly to those groups or individuals who face disadvantage or discrimination

3.2 Customer choice and control

Customers will be able to experience greater choice and control in the services they receive. To improve the delivery and responsiveness of council services to our customers we need to:

1. Design and deliver services around customers' choices and needs. Customer requirements must be at the heart of the design process - usability and accessibility through multiple devices should be central to the design of services.
2. Develop and maintain a set of measurable, one-council performance standards for customer service, including complaints handling.
3. Widen the choice of access channels for customers, and improve performance but still focus on telephone contact as the most popular contact method as identified by the citizen survey.
4. Promote customer self-service and cheaper channels through effective communication and by making them easier to use, to deliver significant efficiency and quality improvements.

The council will need to manage a migration plan, which progressively moves customers to cheaper channels and a lower cost per transaction as shown in the diagram below. This will need to be undertaken whilst maintaining or improving the quality of the service.



The council has a unique opportunity to harness this shift in how people communicate to its advantage, as encouraging people to shift to different channels can bring substantial savings. The table below shows the industry standard costs per transaction incurred by local authorities for different contact channels.

Channel	Average cost per transaction
Face to face	£14
Telephone (through call centre)	£4
Self service	20p
Web	17p

Note: Average costs based on data gathered by SOCITM.

As demonstrated there are substantial differences between the costs associated with different channels. The average face-to-face transactions cost £14 for the council to handle, while the average website transaction (providing the system is fully integrated and automated) costs on average just 17p.

Trying to change people's behaviour so that they use cheaper channels when interacting with the council is a key challenge. Some behaviours are easy to influence, and change can potentially come about naturally, without the need for the completely redesigning of services and processes. We also have the opportunity to influence behaviour through creating an ideal customer journey, which we believe will suit the needs of our customers. Along with other tools Lean business transformation is being used to this end. Lean provides a key resource in creating more efficient ways of delivering services and ensuring that they are configured around improving value for the customer. They focus on identifying and eliminating waste processes, so that improved value and service can be achieved.

It is however unrealistic to assume that we will be able to change the behaviour of all of our customers, for every different service we offer. For some, certain behaviours

may be deeply ingrained, and therefore, any attempts we make to change this will be of limited use unless we understand what the customer need is. In theory, if we are able to save costs by changing the behaviour of those who we know we can change, these costs could then be allocated to services and customers who most need them.

“No-one is ever going to move to a channel or service that is harder to use or less beneficial”

Colum Joyce, Global Electronic Business Strategy Manager, DHL

New channels produce greater choice for customers. Understanding the needs and preferences of customers is vital if these channels are to be successfully exploited by the Council. Customer preferences vary considerably by age, socio-demographic group, and location. Universal preferences cannot be assumed and therefore, to ensure accessibility, and inclination to use a channel, the Council will need to find out the preferences of our customers in relation to the services and the types of transactions required. Demanding customers seek services that are accessible and easy to use, and the Council is committed to meeting this expectation efficiently.

3.3 Engaging with our customer

The city council engages with its customers in a variety of ways and seeks advice, information and opinions about strategies, policies and services. These are used to inform the Councils decision making and help design good services.

On going engagement and feedback is important to identify needs and to develop services. Different methods are used to engage with our customer. The ChYpPS service for example builds 1-2-1 relationships and trust with its customers by working closely with them on a informal and common level, while City Homes has residents forums and mystery shopping exercises to identify how it is performing. Customer feedback and satisfaction data will be crucial in shaping services to the needs of our customers. The CSC for example will introduce feedback mechanisms at every point of customer interaction using the Gov-metric feedback system.



Feedback from our customers is important in shaping our services to meet customers needs and can help us to continually improve the services we offer. The Council wants to be open and honest, that it cares about providing good services, and that it genuinely values feedback on its services.

Our aim is to:

- Capitalise on best practice in handling positive and negative customer feedback in all service areas
- Develop integrated complaints and representations handling processes across Directorates using the customer services CRM,
- Embed a pro-active, problem-solving culture across the Council through organisational learning and workforce development
- Enable more consistent and effective complaints and representations monitoring across all Directorates, linking across to the corporate performance management framework

- Consider compliments, comments and complaints as part of a broader commitment to the development of the Council's customer care agenda

We must have access to timely information about our customers, their needs and preferences. Having a regular dialogue with our customers will help us shape the services that they want, in a way that they require it. This priority area will deliver:

1. A programme of diverse consultation methods.
2. Feedback mechanisms at every point of customer access at the CSC using Govmetric.
3. A 'customer insight' programme making use of consumer and demographic data sources to target specific services to customers e.g. council tax direct debit.

Relationships with our customers and enforcement

The Council provides many and varied services and carries out a range of functions which involve aspects of enforcement. This is one of the principle functions of any government service, to serve and protect by the application of laws [in addition to other advisory roles].

Maintaining good customer relationships is important but some times we have to take action against our customers due to non-compliance or breaches of council permissions, policies, statutory laws and byelaws e.g. benefit fraud, planning and building control, environmental health, etc.

The council have powers to enforce some current legislation which can mean that the council can issue warnings, statutory notices, fixed penalty notices, and even court proceedings against alleged offenders. All of our enforcement actions are undertaken in accordance with the Enforcement Concordat and the council's Enforcement Policy.

The law sometimes requires the Council or its staff to do certain things in certain ways, which can appear confusing to others. Where anybody is uncertain what they are being asked to do or why, there should always be an opportunity to have it explained in clear and simple language by a member of staff.

Where better enforcement is possible through working with others, such as other Councils, enforcing agencies, or the business community, these links will be formed and developed. Where there is a right of appeal against an enforcement activity, this will be clearly explained with the opportunity for informal appeal to a senior officer. The Council also has a corporate complaints procedure if residents and businesses are unhappy with how they have been treated.

As a caring Council we will listen to the views of its residents, businesses and others in promoting fair and appropriate enforcement to encourage economic growth and prosperity and the enjoyment of personal freedoms without unacceptable risk of harm, whilst protecting those in need.

3.4 Marketing products and services

All customers should be aware of the products and services that the Council can offer. Information can be gathered at the Guildhall, Tourist information, Mandela House and area Housing offices, community centres as well as online information on

the website, twitter face book etc. Information is also published in newspapers and direct to the resident's houses in newsletters and with council tax information.

Effective marketing can help to explain and promote what the City Council is doing across the city. It can also be helpful in changing behaviours and attitudes and helping to increase public confidence. Good marketing is also needed to make sure that residents can clearly identify the services that are available to support them.

Simply making services available through new channels does not necessarily mean that customers will use them. Behaviour can be influenced by making people aware of the value added to their service experience when using new channels and thus making take-up more likely. The key to influencing behaviour positively is to market the advantages of changing – or indeed the disadvantages of not changing - to the customer. Positive drivers need to be identified and used since inertia is often the most powerful shackle preventing behavioural change.

Information about these services and products should be transparent and easily accessible. This priority area will deliver:

1. Marketing that demonstrates a one council approach for all.
2. Developed information feeds across the whole council to advertise and promote services harnessing existing technology, e.g. Website, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Flickr.
3. Promotion to customers of the benefits of self service and online services.

3.5 Leadership:

The council is committed to putting the customer at the heart of everything it does and developing a culture that demonstrates positive behaviours during every contact with our customers.

We will prioritise customer focus at all levels throughout our organisation by embedding this focus within our Organisational Development Strategy and induction process and we will evaluate individual and team commitment using our performance management system.

We will empower, train and encourage all of our staff to actively promote what we do and feel able to deliver the customer focused culture that we want to provide within the council. Embedding best practice throughout the council will begin with customer awareness workshops for all staff to ensure consistent values are shared and understood.

Finally we need strong leadership to pursue good customer service and to embed the 'One Council' approach for customers. This priority area will:

1. Continue with the corporate leadership programme that focuses on improving corporate capability when dealing with customers and develops the ethos of a one Council approach.
2. Identify and develop 'Customer First' champions to provide continued challenge and stimulus throughout the Council.

3. Regular staff promotional and service events to activity keep the 'customer experience' at the forefront of everything we do.

The Councils Change programme

The Council's vision is focussed on people, place and planet in all we do, and everyone should be able to see how they support those goals. To deliver this ambitious vision for Cambridge, the Council will have to keep changing, to ensure its services are equipped to deliver the vision with fewer resources.

To help our services meet this challenge, we need to change the way we do things in the Council. We cannot afford to do all the things we've done previously, in the way we've always done them. The Council has changed a lot already in recent years, for instance introducing the customer service centre, and implementing the corporate restructure, by removing the client contractor split in City Services.

Over the coming years the council will be implementing its key change programme which includes four strands:

Culture change - recognising that we need to keep changing, and building a more flexible, customer-focussed approach to how we do things, working as "one council".

Bureaucracy busting - recognising that some aspects of some of our policies and procedures slow down the pace at which we can make decisions or changes, and that some of this may be unnecessary

Managing service change - ensuring our services are focussed on understanding and meeting customer needs, delivering high quality services in the context of policy and legislative changes, and rising or changing demands from residents.

Modern Business Environment - making sure that the council's infrastructure, its buildings, systems and processes, are modern and flexible and focussed on efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

4.0 Customer Charter

The customer service charter will be adopted for use across the Council. It is explicit about the standards our customers can expect to experience when contacting us. The charter will be regularly reviewed to reflect the changing needs of our customers and the opportunities that we will have in the future to improve delivery due to the improved use of technology.

At the charter's heart is our commitment to improving the quality of life of local people. We strive to get it right, first time, every time. We believe that customers have the right to know what level of service they can expect from us all the time - even when we fall short of the very high standards we have set ourselves.

We will:

- Improve our speed of response in handling enquiries from customers by ensuring our information is in a format that can be easily accessed and understood.
- Maintain a single point of contact, open at times that, reflect customer need and at a cost, which is suitable and acceptable to our customers.
- Provide responsive, reliable, satisfying services that meet the expectations of the residents and customers.
- Provide a consistent, co-ordinated and proactive service. Customer Service employees will be able to identify if the customer needs extra help or advice, will help resolve problems and take personal responsibility for them.
- Make it more convenient, easier and quicker for the residents of Cambridge City to deal with us.
- Make sure that the customer experience is consistent – whether in a local area housing office, interaction with a Park Ranger or at the Guildhall reception.
- Enable customers to serve themselves if they choose to and encourage more to choose to by making this an easy and efficient option.
- Treat our customers with respect, courtesy and friendliness, being receptive to customer feedback.
- Enable our customers to provide feedback easily, through customer surveys, focus groups, feedback, consultation and improved complaint handling.
- Ensure our employees are skilled and able to provide high quality customer care.
- Partner with other Council departments and organisations to achieve a joined up programme of work, including sharing of learning and best practice to ensure a seamless Customer Service approach.

Quality of Service

We already set measurable standards for the timeliness of response for complaints and freedom of information requests. This strategy now brings all standards under one document to include all forms of customer contact including phone calls, e-communications and personal callers. Our customer service standards are as follows:

Contacting us in person

- We aim to see customers in the Customer Service Centre, Housing Area offices or Guildhall reception within 10 minutes from arriving.
- Waiting areas will be comfortable and tidy and facilities for children will be provided in the Customer Service Centre at Mandela House.
- All customer facing staff will wear identification badges.
- Opening hours will be clearly displayed.
- Information will be kept up-to-date and will be well presented.
- Facilities for people with a disability will be available at public receptions.
- Private interview facilities will be provided when necessary.
- Customer comment cards or feedback screens will be available for you to let us know what you thought of the service you received.

Contacting us on the telephone

- We will aim to answer all telephone calls within 12 seconds of the first ring.
- When answering the telephone, staff will clearly state their name and section.
- The staff member who answers your call will aim to answer your enquiry there and then. If we cannot answer your enquiry or transfer you to the right person straight away, we will take your details and make sure someone contacts you.
- When returning your calls, staff will clearly state their name, their section and their reason for calling.

Contacting us by letter or fax

- If you contact us by letter or fax we will endeavour to respond fully within 7 working days unless, for example, your query is complex or involves several service units. In this case we will acknowledge your letter within 5 working days of receipt and let you know who is looking after your query, what action we are taking and when a reply can be expected.
- The response you receive will clearly address your enquiry, but we will include contact details if this is not the case or you have any further enquiries.

Contacting us by email

- We aim to respond to all emails received by our Customer Service Centre within 4 working hours.

- The response you receive will clearly address your enquiry, but we will include contact details if this is not the case or you have any further enquiries.
- All other council services will respond fully to your email within 7 working days, unless you receive an 'out of office' notification to your email advising that the staff member is unavailable. The notification will include contact details for urgent enquiries and a date when the staff member will be available to reply.

Freedom of Information requests

- We will supply the information under FOI within 20 working days, except in exceptional circumstances. In such circumstances we will contact you to let you know why it is going to take longer than 20 days to collate the information requested, or if there are reasons why it is not appropriate to release all the information requested. We will explain why we are not releasing the information, if that is the case, and explain the appeal process.

Complaints

- We aim to reply to all complaints within 7 working days. If we need longer, we will tell you why. We will also let you know who is dealing with your complaint and when we will reply.
- If you are not happy with the response you can ask for the complaint to be referred to the independent complaints investigator, who will investigate the complaint for you.

Facebook and Twitter

- We aim to respond to posts within 1 working day.

Translation and interpretation

- If English is not your first language and you need some help in understanding any of the services the Council delivers, we offer telephone or Face-to-Face language interpretation services.

Other defined service standards exist for specific services across the Council including the Housing Support service, Housing Options and Advice service and Sport and Fitness services.

5.0 How will the strategy be delivered?

The success of this strategy will be determined not only by consultation and feedback we receive from customers and the increased measures of performance but by the effectiveness of its dissemination and understanding throughout the Council.

The key actions required to be undertaken to deliver this strategy include:

- Customer Service Champions will be created across the organisation and will have authority to be sufficiently influential to encourage both senior management and staff at all levels to make sure that their working practices support both the resident and corporate needs, ahead of their departmental needs.
- Customer awareness workshops and a customer care training and development programme will be introduced. The customer awareness workshop will be rolled-out to all staff. New employees will receive customer awareness training as part of their Corporate Induction to the Council.
- All employees will be provided with a summary of the strategy and they will be expected to demonstrate that they are contributing towards the Council's vision for customer service.
- In order to make sure that services are delivered in-line with best practice, we will publish our comprehensive range of service standards. The Customer Charter and service standards detailed in section 4.0 have provide the benchmark against which all council staff need to deliver services.
- Performance targets within the CSC have been developed with the aim to continuously improve customer service. We will monitor customer satisfaction with a goal of increasing this year on year.
- Design customer interactions from a customer perspective using business process reviews e.g. Lean Thinking*.

*Lean is a method that focuses on service provision in the most efficient manner by improving flow and eliminating waste from processes. By undertaking process reviews across targeted service areas the customer interface and the supporting back office processes can be streamlined. Each process needs to be assessed for its added value to the customer, if it is found to have more non added value than added value, then this is classed as "waste" within the process and we will look to eliminate this to provide a more efficient and customer focussed service. A programme of reviews will be arranged to deliver these improvements.

6.0 Improvement Plan

Priority Area	Outcome	Actions	When	Lead
Leadership	Leaders will promote a one council approach for customers.	Create and support a team of customer champions to practice and develop consistently high quality customer service within their service areas.	October 2012	Senior management team
	Customer ethos is embedded across Council	Undertake a continuous customer service promotion campaign for staff using posters, newsletters, events etc.	Start August 2012	Senior management team and Head of Customer Services
	Efficient and customer focussed services	Develop and implement a staff customer service awareness programme, which enhances our capacity to deliver sustained high quality customer service. Designed and run by Customer Champion's across the Council.	November 2102	Customer champions and Head of Customer Services
		Implementation of customer Lean process reviews across six service areas.	July 2013	Heads of Service

Engaging with Our Customers	We have access to timely information about our customers, their needs and preferences.	CSC -Introduce feedback mechanisms at every point of customer interaction using Gov-metric.	Face to face already introduced Phones by July 2012 Web by August 2012 Emails by September 2012	Head of Customer Services
	We have a regular dialogue with customers, which gives us an insight that helps us shape and improve the services we provide to customers.	Year on year rise in customer satisfaction.	March 2013	Service Managers
Customer Channel management and Choice and Control	We have multiple ways for customers to access our services. These channels, with the support of technology, provide fast and flexible service provision.	Develop SMS and social media service provision as appropriate. 10% increased take up of emails, face-book twitter , web hits over the year.	Already started April 2013	Head of Customer Services Head of Customer Services
	Where appropriate provide services in partnership to allow greater flexibility and ease of access.	Introduce self service payment machine at Mandela House. Introduce self help information kiosks at Area Housing offices.	September 2012 January 2013	Head of Customer Services Head of Customer Services

		<p>Greater working with CCAB including debt advisers based at Mandela House</p> <p>Increase web traffic by 10% following introduction of the new web site</p>	<p>November 2012</p> <p>November 2013</p>	<p>Head of Customer Services</p> <p>Head of corporate strategy</p>
Marketing and services	<p>Our customers are aware of the products and services that the Council can offer and the standards they will receive.</p> <p>Information about these services and products are transparent and easily accessible.</p>	<p>Service standards published and periodically reviewed</p> <p>Develop the capability for managers to analyse customer and demographic data using ESD toolkit.</p>	<p>Published by August 2012</p> <p>Managers courses run and implemented by April 2013</p>	<p>Head of customer services</p> <p>Service Managers</p>

6.0 Document Control Page

Document Identification

Title : Customer Access Strategy
Document Ref. : CMS v8 Committee Version
CI Ref. :
Version : 8
Date : 25/05/12

History

Version	Date	Author	Description
V1	12/01/11	JJ	First draft for discussion
V3	16/05/11	JJ	Version 3
V4	23/09/11	JJ	Version 4
V6	22/01/12	JJ	Version 6 Final draft
V7	4/02/12	JJ	Version 7 Final draft
V8	1/03/12	JJ	Version 8 SLT draft
V8	25/05/12	JJ	Committee Version

Any comments, queries or change control requests about this document
Should be addressed to: Jonathan James