

# **APPENDIX H**

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE – 7 OCTOBER 2008**

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**Title:**

**CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY AND LOCALTY OFFICE SERVICE**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Taylor-Smith]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report is in two parts. In the first part the Executive are asked to consider a proposed methodology for the production of a Customer Service Strategy for Waverley. The second part follows on from a report earlier on the agenda concerning the review of payment receipting services and the implications of this review on the future role for local offices.

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**Environmental implications:**

How customer service is provided can have a positive impact on the environment an example being the development of electronic self service over the internet, as is the provision of local offices in each of Waverley's centres of population.

**Social / community implications:**

Excellent customer service would contribute positively to the benefit of all sections of the community. Ensuring service is targeted to the more vulnerable would contribute to the Council's priority of improving lives.

**E-Government implications:**

Customer service relies on IT systems in order to provide services or information to customers. An increasingly important method of service provision for customers is the internet and any proposed Customer Service Strategy will include the development of this access channel.

**Resource implications:**

There are no direct resource implications involved in the development of a Customer Service Strategy however financial implications that emerge from the strategy will be reported when the Executive considers the outcome of this work. It may however be necessary to establish an implementation budget to enable experimentation and testing of new approaches to customer service.

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## **Need for a Customer Service Strategy**

1. The last general satisfaction survey with Waverley collected as part of the Best Value Performance Indicator General Satisfaction Survey in 2006 resulted in a satisfaction rating of 59% which was below the upper quartile rate for local authorities generally.
2. Customers now have increasing expectations of customer service to provide quicker and easier access to the information they need, Waverley has recognised this and has put value for money and customer focus as one of its key priorities. Unlike many private sector organisations our services are diverse - from discretionary services such as providing leisure facilities to statutory elements such as refuse collection. Despite the diversity of activities in which Waverley is involved it is one organisation working for and on behalf of its residents, tenants and businesses.
3. There is increasing importance being placed on the role of customer services in contributing to a range of national policies including the following:
  - CPA – specific reference to customer service
  - Local Government Reputation Project
  - Efficiency Agenda
  - Transformational Government - Local priorities determined with customers
  - Varney Review – Transforming services across the public sector
  - Putting the Customer First – Local government Association
  - The 'diversity / equality agenda'
4. These national agendas potentially impact on Waverley in a variety of ways including funding levels, assessment criteria and public expectations.
5. The strategy to be developed would set an overall framework and strategic direction for the development of customer services across the Council with the aim of delivering high quality, professional, accessible and consistent services. The proposed strategy would also take into account tailoring services to need. The strategy would build on the good practice and initiatives already introduced in Waverley and serve to reinforce the customer centric culture which has been introduced by the Chief Executive,
6. The overall aim of the strategy would be to improve customer satisfaction levels in the face of increasing demands and expectations.

## **Customer Service infrastructure**

7. The delivery of any Customer Service Strategy will link and impact on the following:
  - Staff – in particular front line staff in services
  - Buildings – Council buildings and reception areas, requirements of DDA etc

- Technology – the Council's ICT Strategy will be required to support the delivery of the Customer Service Strategy
- Training – programmes to support staff particularly those at 'first point of contact'

### **Process**

8. It is proposed that a Customer Service Special Interest Group be set up to oversee the development of the Customer Service Strategy. A cross service officer group (Customer Service Team – CST) would be established which would be responsible for developing the strategy and reporting to the Advisory Board on progress.
9. The CST would review different models of service, consult with stakeholders, councillors, customers, partner organisations and staff in order to formulate a Waverley approach to customer service.
10. In order to progress this initiative officers seek approval to immediately begin to experiment with different approaches to customer service in order to test and evaluate the effectiveness of different models of service provision.

### **Locality Office Service – Implications of review of Payment Receipting Service**

11. The Executive will be considering earlier on the agenda for this meeting an item from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee with their findings on the review carried out into the Council's payment receipting service (cashiering). The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commended to the Executive the proposals for changing the Council's payment receipting system on the basis that it offered a cost-effective alternative to the current arrangements i.e. closure of the four Council cash counters to be replaced by alternative payment outlets provided by the post office and other retail outlets.
12. As regards the locality office service the view of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was that even without the cashiering function it was important that the provision of local access points for enquiry purposes should be retained.
13. If the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are approved the staffing levels at the Council's Locality Offices would be reduced significantly from 8.5 fte to 6 fte staff to provide a face to face enquiry service at Farnham Cranleigh and Haslemere. If the Executive are minded to accept the view of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee that locality enquiry services should be retained there will need to be a refocusing and realigning of the services provided from local offices.
14. The general timing proposed for the closure of the cash offices and replacement with alternative arrangements is April 2010.
15. It is therefore proposed that during the next nine months officers review the opportunities for refocusing the role of local offices and in particular explore the possibilities of co-location of facilities and shared service provision as part of the overall Customer Service Strategy process outlined earlier in this report.

## **Conclusion**

16. The provision of customer focused services is one of the Council's main priorities and the development of the Customer service Strategy proposed that would establish an overall framework and strategic direction for the development of customer services over the next five years.
17. Recognising the significance of this task it is proposed that a Customer Services Special Interest Group (SIG) be established to be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Customer Service with a total membership of seven members from across the borough and that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to agree the membership. The aim would be to conclude the work of the SIG by August 2009. The proposed terms of reference for the Customer Services SIG are as follows:

To establish an overall framework and strategic direction for the development of customer services across the Council with the aim of delivering high quality, professional, accessible and consistent services.

As part of this process to review the opportunities for refocusing the role of local offices and in particular explore the possibilities of co-location of facilities and shared service provision.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive approves

1. the Customer Service Strategy process outlined above;
2. the establishment of a Customer Service SIG, with a membership of seven and the membership to be authorised by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder; and
3. the terms of reference for the SIG, as set out in the report.

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### **Background Papers (SD(E))**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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