

Customer Service Strategy 2009 - 2012

Introduction

1. This strategy sets the overall framework and strategic direction for the development of customer services across the Council in accordance with the Council's priority of promoting and achieving value for money and customer focus. The standards we aim to achieve are set out in the Customer Charter attached. The Customer Services Strategy is supported by the ICT Strategy (Vision and Direction of Travel 2009 - 2012). An Action Plan for the delivery of the strategy is set out in the Annexe to this document.

The Strategy – Aims and Objectives

2. The overall aim for the strategy is:

To provide a high quality value for money service for Waverley customers which will be reviewed in the light of customer feedback and best practice to ensure continuous improvement.

3. The overall approach of the strategy is based on the principles of providing customer choice, recognising differing customer needs and improving efficiency for the benefit of customers.
4. In order to deliver and guide continuous and customer focused improvements a number of strategic objectives have been adopted and these are as follows:
 - To respond to the needs of customers who may find it difficult to access our services particularly for those who are most vulnerable or where there are issues of disability, equality, race or geographical location.
 - To help all customers access services and information and to the provision of local offices in each main centre of population for face-to-face service.
 - To resolve more simple customer contacts at the first point of contact whatever form of contact channel is used including; telephone, face-to-face, website, letter and e-mail making it easier and less time consuming for customers to get answers to their questions.
 - To encourage self-service wherever appropriate through use of the website and or telephony ensuring people can access services and information most cost effectively and at the time most convenient to them.
 - To reduce avoidable contacts by learning from our customers and by ensuring that information we provide is clear and easily available.

- To improve the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of responses to customers' requests. The aim is for the customer to get an informed and accurate response from the first member of staff they contact.
- To develop new access channels where they will make us more accessible to customers, particularly the hard to reach groups. This may include those who live in rural areas, have special needs and those groups who don't readily engage with the Council, for example, young people.
- To learn about our customers, why they contact us and to allow us to use this knowledge to structure service provision and delivery based on customer needs.
- To systematically gather information and knowledge of customers and their needs.
- To understand why people choose to contact us in different ways so we can most readily accommodate their needs and provide customer choice wherever possible.

How will we deliver the strategy?

5. The customer services strategy can only be delivered through all Council staff engaging in the culture and philosophy of a high quality customer service orientated organisation. It is important to have commitment and ownership at all levels in the authority if we are to deliver the changes required in this strategy. Key components for the delivery of the strategy will be a corporate approach to customer service training for staff and in particular for front-line staff and the adoption of standards for delivering a consistent quality approach to customer service.
6. The strategy will be delivered through the programme of work which is set out in the Action Plan included in this document.
7. The process is to be managed by the Head of Customer Services, IT and Office Services who would be supported by an officer service wide Customer Service Team. Progress on the delivery of the Action Plan would be monitored by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and through six monthly reports to the Executive.

Staff

8. All staff are engaged in the process of improving customer services and attached as part of the background to the strategy are Waverley's Customer Care Charter and the short guide for all staff. There are three main categories of staff who have a particularly high profile with regard to customer service and these are as follows:

i) Customer Services Group – This is a dedicated team of staff including staff at the Council's local offices who will provide the face-to-face services for the Council, manage telephony and main reception and assist in responding to peaks in customer enquiries across the Council.

ii) Front-line service staff – These staff are based in individual service areas and provide the first point of contact with customers mainly through telephone calls and e-mails. Many of these staff have specialised knowledge to answer detailed enquiries. These staff will remain based in services.

iii) Professional or specialist staff – These are professional staff such as Planners, Environmental Health Officers, Building Control Officers, Housing Surveyors etc who have frequent contact with the public often offsite.

Local Offices

9. The facilities to be provided at the Council's local offices are ordered in terms of a hierarchy of importance beginning with support to Waverley's core statutory services :

- **Waverley's statutory core services**
Local offices to serve as access points for advice and information on the full range of the Council's core statutory services, systems and Council information.
- **Specialist appointments for key Waverley services**
Offices to operate regular appointment sessions run by specialist staff from Council services such as Planning, Housing, Benefits etc. Provide facilities for councillors surgeries. Also encourage advice surgeries from outside bodies such as debt counselling surgeries. The offices also provide an office base for travelling staff.
- **Specific Waverley functions**
The offices to continue to provide certain specific functions such as concessionary fare administration, cemetery administration (Haslemere) and administration of controlled parking zones (CPZ Farnham). The offices would also be available to support Waverley economic development and business support initiatives. They would also serve as an office base for travelling officers and for member surgeries.
- **Access to other services**
Develop links to County Council and Town and Parish services to enable easy reporting of issues and the provision of information on these services. Information points and signposting to other service providers such as police, CAB, Age Concern, health services. The opportunity to develop these facilities would provide added value to all Waverley's local offices.

- Local information
Offices to be used as information points for parish and town council services. The local offices would also provide local tourist information as well as other local information on events, exhibitions etc.

Buildings

10. The Council's buildings and reception areas should be laid out to support the objectives of this strategy and to provide appropriate customer and staff spaces. The facilities required would include private, appropriately equipped, secure meeting rooms for discussions on confidential or sensitive matters.
11. The Council delivers face-to-face services at its Central Offices in Godalming and at its local offices in Farnham, Cranleigh and Haslemere.
12. It is important to ensure that these and any offices used for the delivery of face-to-face services, meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and relevant equality and diversity requirements. The Action Plan includes provision for the assessment of suitable customer and staff / service spaces. Building works and reception layouts will be considered for individual sites and implemented in accordance with specific schemes approved as part of the Capital Programme process.
13. Generally the co-location of Waverley services with partner organisations in shared buildings is seen as the preferred way forward as a means of providing access to a wider range of services for customers as well as providing the opportunity for economies in the running and operating costs of buildings.

Technology

14. The Customer Service Strategy will be underpinned and supported by the Council's ICT Strategy 2009 – 2012.

The key initiatives of the ICT Strategy as it relates to customer service are:

(i) Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System – The introduction of a CRM system is required to provide information and intelligence on customer contact across the range of Council services. We need to know who is contacting us and why in order to be able to target resources and streamline processes this will become increasingly significant as financial constraints take effect. The knowledge obtained corporately i.e. the single view of the customer, will be used to inform and develop service provision and provide the opportunity to improve customer contact and service provision. CRM will be introduced initially into areas of high volume customer contacts. This will provide the Council with the infrastructure and support needed to achieve a single view of the customer, continuously update information and ensure the smooth integration between front and back office activities. This will allow organisational learning about our

customers (customer insight). This in turn will enable us to design services that meet our customers needs, and improve performance and efficiency.

(ii)Communicating with customers (Email, Text messaging, Telephone, Webcast) - We need to exploit technology to expand the current methods of communicating with our customers. As electronic communication becomes more the normal mode of communication, Waverley should expand the use of email and text. We need to exploit technology to improve telephone call handling across the authority. If it is appropriate to introduce automatic call routing facilities (Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology) we will ensure that this development would be well-structured and suited to business/customer need.

15. Customer Feedback and consultation - We need to develop and use customer feedback and consultation information when developing services including NI14 and customer feedback. The establishment of a Citizens Panel will be an important source of feedback on customer service provision. The information obtained from feedback and knowledge gained from sources such as the proposed CRM system will be used to inform future service delivery and business transformation.

16. Website – We need to continually review and improve the website. Customers expect to be able to visit the Council's website for an increasing number of services. We will exploit our presence on the web to reduce the number of avoidable contacts by making a wider range of services and information available on-line. Our aim will be to actively encourage customers to shift access channels to the web wherever feasible. In particular we will concentrate on the following:

- Customer interaction – self-service (payments, account balance)
- Public facing web mapping ('in my area' service)
- On-line transactions

Training

There will be a comprehensive start-up and ongoing training programme to support the staff in the implementation of the new technology, the delivery of high quality customer care and the service specific training required for those at "first point of contact". All of the key front-line service teams will be trained to the NVQ for Customer Service standard and other core competencies will be developed.

The importance of Complaints

We will deal with complaints received from our customers quickly and efficiently, and when things do go wrong, learn from those mistakes so that services can be improved and developed. Complaints provide invaluable information on how our services are perceived, and it is therefore important that our complaints process is seen as an integral part of the services we provide to our customers.

What are the expected outputs and how will we measure performance?

17. The strategy aims are to improve customer satisfaction levels in the face of increasing demands and expectations.
18. The action plan will enable us to learn more about our customers. This information will then inform the design of our service delivery for both front and back offices and enable information and services to be delivered in ways that are targeted, cost effective and that meet customers needs.
19. We will monitor performance to assess customer satisfaction, response levels and equality issues by a number of techniques including mystery shoppers, customer surveys and feedback, and statistics provided by the new technology.

Looking to the Future

20. This is a three-year strategy which will guide how the Council delivers customer orientated services.
21. The action plan will be updated annually to provide a new and challenging programme based on the lessons learnt from our customers, changes in technology, review of service delivery and examples of best practice.