

Subject: Customer Services Strategy

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 24 January 2007

Report of: Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services & E-Government

Portfolio

Holder: Customer Services & E-Government

Key Decision:

NO

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update members on progress with the delivery of the Customer Service Strategy.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities:

- Embedding our customer promise and developing the Getting It Right First Time culture within the organization (customers)
- Improved front line services and improved performance across the 8 x8 by 2008 indicators (improvement)
- Working with Capita for the provision of the Councils Revenues, Benefits And Customer Access Services (partnerships)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 The Borough Council's customer services strategy has been an essential tool in order to assist the Borough in driving up customer standards and delivering excellent customer service. The Aims of the strategy were designed to:-

- Ensure Rossendale Council provided excellent customer service
- Putting customers first at every point of contact
- Increasing the number of customer transactions with the Council resolved at the first point of contact
- Providing services designed for customers
- To help facilitate cultural change within the Council which makes us more customer focused.

4.2 Progress to Date

4.2.1 Since the implementation of the Customer Services Strategy the Borough has made significant progress in achieving its aims. In particular it has:

- Opened the One Stop Shop.
Developed an award winning web site (best in Lancashire in 2006). The web site has received 3,312,444 hits during 2006.
- Increased on line activities for customer use.
- Ensured all staff received customer care training.
- Implemented the Capita contract in relation to revenue, benefits and customer service activities.
- Undertaken internal audits to ensure staff compliance with standards
- Refreshed the complaints procedure.
- Undertaken local customer surveys OSS in the one Stop Shop
- Planned customer surveys on the Revenue and Benefits 0845 number will be undertaken.
- Developed Customer Standards and Customer Promise.

4.3 Access to Services

4.3.1 Customers can now access the services provided by the Council in a number of ways. A key part of our direct interface with customers is the One Stop Shop. The day to day management of this facility has been contracted to Capita with effect from 30 October 2006. A comprehensive training programme has been developed to ensure that staff are skilled and up to date in handling the full range of customer enquiries at the first point of contact. Since its opening on 15 December 2005, the One Stop Shop has now been visited by over 26000 customers. The top five reasons for customer visits are:

- Housing & Council Tax Benefits - 29.9%
- Council Tax Billing & Recovery - 15.6%
- Housing (Greenvale Homes) - 15.4%
- Development Control - 9.0%
- Bus Passes - 6.1%

4.3.2 The One Stop Shop continues to improve its facilities for all customers and is an example the continuous improvement culture which now exists. Recent enhancements have been better signage to advertise the availability of access to Language Line for people who do not have English as a first language and signage about loop systems to assist hearing impaired customers has also been renewed. We already have a 'Minicom' system available to assist hearing impaired customers make contact with us by telephone. We are now

investigating an improved range of customer leaflets in alternative languages and for the visually impaired. One very useful and popular booklet from the Pension Service has, for instance, been obtained in large print, on audio cassette and in Braille. Additionally, we are working on enhancements to the queuing control system in the One Stop Shop to better suit the needs of the visually impaired.

4.3.3 The latest results from the One Stop Shop Customer Satisfaction Survey, covering the quarter July - September 2006, are very encouraging. 95.2% of respondents said they were extremely satisfied or satisfied with their experience of using the One Stop Shop. Opening hours appears to suit the needs of those using the One Stop Shop. However, additional survey work will be carried out during 2007 in relation to hours of opening to ensure the needs of customers are being met.

4.4 In general it is felt contact methods are good with customers being able to access the council in person, telephone, email, web or in writing. The main council switchboard is well publicized and from 30 October 2006 customers wishing to talk to specialist staff in relation to revenue and benefits are now able to contact a specialist call centre whose hours are extended to 08.45 – 7.00 Monday to Friday. This latter service enhancement has been made available as a direct result of the partnership with Capita. The number of calls received by the call centre in December 2006 was 2986, with 92% of the calls being answered within 20 seconds. Since the call centre first opened we have received 7805 calls, with 85% of the calls being answered within 20 seconds.

4.5 Contact via the web has increased significantly over the past 12 months with the web site receiving over 3,312,444 hits in 2006.

A number of new services have been made available over the web site since its initial introduction:

- Making online planning applications.
- Accessing an on online corporate library.
- Making payments online for council Tax, NNDR, Housing benefits.
- Checking Council Tax payments made.
- Applying for Rossendale jobs.
- Also a new Rossendale Intranet has been developed and was implemented in December 2006. The new Intranet training will be rolled out by February 2007.

5.0 Internal Audits and Mystery Shopping

5.1 Internal audits to assess staff compliance with some of the key customer service standards took place in January and July 2006. There was a high compliance with telephone response times and the use of name badges with the majority of standards checked showing improvement.

5.2 Mystery Shopping using the web, telephone and letter will be carried out in the One stop Shop and the Revenue and Benefits 0845 number. The exercise will be carried out during the first quarter of 2007.

- 5.3 Monitoring of Corporate Complaints and Ombudsman enquiries is carried out to ensure learning points are captured. For example a high proportion of recent complaints related to planning functions. These complaints have been analysed and process and system changes have been implemented within planning in order to address the concerns raised.

There has been a reduction in the number of Ombudsman complaints that have been received for example, in the year to 31st March 2006 the Local Government Ombudsman received 35 complaints against the Council. The previous year to the 31st March 2005 the Council received 37 complaints against the Council.

- 5.3.1 The Complaints procedure is currently being refreshed in order to make it more effective and will be relaunched in early 2007.

6.0 **Local Government Association Reputation Campaign**

- 6.1 The Reputation Campaign sets out to improve the reputation of councils both locally and national. In signing up to the Reputation Campaign, Rossendale Council agrees to progress 12 core actions over the next 12 months. These actions are tried and tested ways to improve the council's customer satisfaction and include:

- A highly visible, strongly branded council cleaning operation.
- No gaps or overlap in council cleaning and maintenance contracts.
- One phone number for the public to report local environmental problems.
- Dealing with 'grot spots'.
- removing abandoned vehicles within 24 hours.
- Green Flag award for at least one park.
- Education and enforcement to protect the environment.
- managing the media effectively to promote and defend the council.
- providing an A-Z guide to council services.
- publishing a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents.
- ensuring the council brand is consistently linked to services.
- communicating well with staff so they become advocates for the council.

- 6.2 Following a self assessment it should be possible for the council to achieve 'gold' status for 10 of the 12 actions within 12 months and silver status for the remaining 2. The cost of implementing the Reputation Campaign can be met from within existing budget allocations (apart from Green Flag status – which will be the subject of external fundraising). By adopting the Reputation Campaign and focusing on improvements within the core actions the council will improve its public image and standing

7 **THE FUTURE**

- 7.2 The implementation of the Capita contract provides a good opportunity to refresh the Customer Service Strategy in order it addresses how people want to access services. It is therefore intended to develop a Customer Access Strategy for consultation in the New Year. This will be the subject of a separate report to members.

8. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

8.1 There are no immediate financial implications other than those noted in section 6 which will be subject to external fundraising.

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

7.1 There are no legal implications

8. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

8.1 The council places great emphasis on customer service training and all new staff receive customer awareness training as part of the corporate induction programme.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Good progress has been made in putting customers first and developing a right first time culture. It is recognized there is much more to do and the further development of the existing customer services strategy into a customer access strategy is essential in order to take customer service to the next level.

10. RECOMMENDATION(S)

10.1 Note the contents of the report and progress to date.

10.2 Approve the Borough Council signing up to the Reputation Campaign.

10.3 Approve the further development of the existing customer services strategy into a customer access strategy.

11. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

11.1 Lead Portfolio Holder

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Customer Services Strategy	www.rossendale.gov.uk